



# PhD Handbook



SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY  
**SCHOOL OF  
COMMUNICATION STUDIES**

## GUIDELINES FOR DOCTORAL STUDY SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES

The School of Communication Studies has a healthy diversity of outlooks and approaches that inform the development of an exceptionally supportive interpersonal climate. We are committed as colleagues to effective teaching and productive research. We believe that our students share these commitments and we are most excited to work with students who want to study in such an environment.

### *School Policies and Procedures*

All graduate students should follow the latest edition of the *MLA Style Manual* or the *APA Publication Manual*, depending on the nature of the research, in their writing. Writing should also show evidence of careful proofreading for grammar, punctuation, and organization as well as proper citation of sources. In all cases, writing must conform to the current edition of the [Graduate School Guidelines for the Preparation of Research Reports, Theses, and Dissertations](#).

All graduate students whose research involves human subjects must receive clearance from the SIUC Human Subjects Committee *prior* to the involvement of subjects. For needed forms, visit the [Institutional Review Board website](#).

#### *Doctor of Philosophy Degree*

The PhD requires a minimum of 75 total credit hours. A student must take 51 credit hours of coursework beyond the master's degree, 9 of which are methodology (AKA tools) courses. A minimum of 36 of those 51 hours must be taken within the School. In addition, 24 credit hours of dissertation work (CMST 600) are required for the Ph.D. degree. Coursework outside the School must be germane to the school curriculum. Students must also meet the residency requirement, which dictates that 24 credit hours of SIU graduate-level courses must be completed as a doctoral student within the first four years of the program. Throughout the program of study, the student must maintain a 3.00 grade point average in all work taken.

- At least 75 credit hours
  - At least 51 credit hours of coursework
    - At least 9 credit hours of tools
    - At least 36 credit hours in CMST graduate courses
  - At least 24 credit hours of dissertation (CMST 600)

The individual student is assigned a temporary faculty facilitator for the first semester and then will select a primary advisor early in the second semester, who will serve as the chair of the advisory committee. The faculty advisor and the student will plan the program of study and form a three-person advisory committee comprising the advisor and two other faculty members from the School. The student and advisor should complete and submit the “**PhD pre-candidacy advisement form**” (see D2L) to the graduate coordinator, once the committee is formed. During the last half of the second semester of course work, the student's progress shall be reviewed by the advisory committee to determine continuation, change, or termination of the student's program. See “**PhD Second Semester Review**” form (on D2L).

The advisory committee is responsible for certifying to the graduate coordinator that the student has met all school requirements for admission to candidacy and has passed the Ph.D. preliminary examination. See

p. 5 for details. After achieving candidacy, a student's advisory committee dissolves, and the student is responsible for securing a dissertation advisor from amongst the Communication Studies graduate faculty. Together, the student and the dissertation advisor will determine an additional four faculty members (at least two of which must be within CMST, and at least one of which must be external to CMST) to serve on the dissertation committee.

All students are required to take CMST 501, Introduction to Communication Research, and CMST 510, Rhetorical Theory. Students selecting Theatre as a curriculum concentration must take 18 hours of Communication Studies courses including CMST 501 and CMST 510. Students on a teaching assistantship must take CMST 539, Teaching Communication Studies at the University Level, in their first semester of teaching.

Each student must register for at least 24 hours of dissertation credit in CMST 600 or THEA 600. After completing 24 credit hours of CMST/THEA 600, students who are no longer full-time must register for at least one credit hour of CMST 601 or THEA 601 during any academic term in which the services of any faculty member are utilized in the supervision of the dissertation.

The dissertation advisor shall, upon consultation with the student, be responsible for setting up a dissertation committee, supervising the dissertation, and administering the final oral examination of the dissertation. The five-person dissertation committee must consist of at least three members of the School of Communication Studies (including the dissertation advisor) and at least one member from outside the School. The dissertation committee shall approve the dissertation prospectus and evaluate the completed dissertation. A student will be recommended for the degree only if the members of the committee, with at most one exception, judge both the dissertation and the performance at the final oral examination to be satisfactory. The dissertation defense is an open meeting.

A summary of the doctoral degree requirements follows:

1. Completion of the second semester review.
2. Completion of 51 credit hours of course work, 9 of which are methodology (tool), and 6 of which are CMST 501 and CMST 510.
3. Fulfillment of the residency requirement (24 credit hours of SIU graduate-level courses within four years).
4. Passing of the preliminary examination.
5. Completion and oral defense of an approved dissertation with 24 hours of dissertation credit.
6. Meeting all graduate school deadlines for submission of dissertation
7. Grade point average of 3.00.
8. Degree conferred not less than six months nor more than five years after admission to candidacy.

#### **Important degree completion timeline requirements**

**REQUIREMENT 1:** A doctoral student has five years after the date candidacy is requested in which to complete their dissertation. For example, if a doctoral student's committee has evaluated their preliminary exams as a pass, and the graduate coordinator/advisor requests candidacy on February 11, 2026, then the student has until February 11, 2031 in which to complete and successfully defend their dissertation.

**REQUIREMENT 2:** Starting Fall 2025, the graduate school requires that all doctoral degrees are completed within 10 years.

These requirements work together, as demonstrated in the scenarios below:

- *Scenario 1:* A student enters the program in Fall 2025. They have until August 2035 in which to complete their doctoral degree. The student achieves candidacy on September 18, 2028. This means that the student only has until September 18, 2033 in which to complete the degree, because of REQUIREMENT 1—5 years after candidacy to complete and defend the dissertation.
- *Scenario 1:* A student enters the program in Fall 2025. They have until August 2035 in which to complete their doctoral degree. The student achieves candidacy on January 15, 2033. The student only has 2.5 years to complete and successfully defend their dissertation, because of REQUIREMENT 2—10 years after entering the program to complete the degree.

If granted, assistantship funding for doctoral students is for four academic years, assuming satisfactory progress toward the degree. A full-time load for students with assistantships is a minimum of 8 credit hours and a maximum of 12 credit hours; once candidacy is achieved, a full-time load for students with assistantships is 6 credit hours and a maximum of 12 credit hours. A full-time load for students not on assistantship is 6 credit hours minimum. In order to complete the program in four years, the following schedule is recommended (note that this schedule includes courses taken during the summer semester—this is not a requirement, just a suggestion for 4-year completion of the degree):

Semester	Course	CH	Notes	Total CH
Fall, year 1	CMST 539	3	Required of all TAs in their first semester at SIU	9
	CMST 501	3	Required of all first-year grads	
	CMST xxx	3		
Spring, year 1	CMST 510	3	Required of all PhD students, offered every other spring	18
	CMST xxx	3	Complete second semester review	
	CMST xxx	3		
Summer, year 1	CMST xxx	3	Optional, though required if on assistantship	24
	Cognate course	3		
Fall, year 2	CMST xxx	3		36
	CMST xxx	3		
	CMST xxx	3		
	Cognate course	3		
Spring, year 2	CMST xxx	3		45
	CMST xxx	3		
	Cognate course	3		
Summer, year 2	CMST xxx	3		48
Fall, year 3	CMST xxx	3	Complete prelims, achieve candidacy	51 CH + 6 diss
	CMST 600	6 <sup>1</sup>		
Spring, year 3	CMST 600	6 <sup>2</sup>	Complete prospectus	51 CH + 12 diss
Summer, year 3	CMST 600	3		51 CH + 15 diss
Fall, year 4	CMST 600	6		51 CH + 18 diss
Spring, year 4	CMST 600	6	Defend dissertation and graduate	51 CH + 24 diss

<sup>1</sup> Although, under rare circumstances, a student may take more than 6 hours of CMST 600/THEA 600 (dissertation hours), a maximum of 6 hours taken before the semester in which the preliminary exam is successfully passed (and candidacy is achieved) will count towards the 24 required.

<sup>2</sup> A student who has successfully passed preliminary exams may take a minimum of 6 credit hours of CMST 600/THEA 600 in subsequent semesters to be considered full-time while on an assistantship.



This schedule depends upon course offerings; it may be the case that the courses a student would like to take are not offered in a given semester.

After a student completes the required 24 credits of dissertation hours (CMST 600/THEA 600) but has not yet completed their degree, and if the student is no longer on an assistantship and intends to complete the degree, they must enroll for 1 credit hour of CMST 601/THEA 601 (continuing enrollment) every semester until graduation.

## **PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION GUIDELINES**

Effective: Spring 1993. Revised: Fall 1996, Fall 2003, Fall 2006, Fall 2014, Spring 2016

### **Definition and Purpose of the Preliminary Examination**

Once the student has completed at least 48 CH of graduate coursework, and prior to admittance to candidacy, the Ph.D. student is required to pass a preliminary examination ("prelims"). The examination is designed to test the student's competencies as a scholar. The examination assesses both the depth and breadth of the student's knowledge within the discipline by focusing upon both the student's curriculum concentration and supporting work in other fields of study. While some questions may be specifically focused upon the anticipated dissertation project, not all should do so. The preliminary examination offers the doctoral student an opportunity to demonstrate that they have become an independent, original, and mature thinker in the discipline as a consequence of the research and study engaged in during formal graduate course work.

This final assessment before the student is admitted to candidacy has two major purposes:

- (1) To appraise the student's ability to write intelligently about issues of substance in their discipline, and
- (2) to assess the student's ability to contribute to original scholarship. Thus, the successful preliminary examination should provide evidence that the student has the potential to write a doctoral dissertation.

### **Examining Procedures**

#### **Committee Structure**

The student's three-person advisory committee will constitute the student's examining committee, all of whom must be members of the School of Communication Studies. It consists of the student's advisory committee chair and the student's two advisory committee members. When a student has completed extensive work in another school, a fourth member of the examining committee may be added from that school for testing purposes.

#### **Nature of the Examination**

The examination preparation and administration will be under the supervision of the student's advisory committee chair. The student will, in consultation with their chair, generate three proposals for consideration by the examining committee. Typically, each proposed question will run approximately one-to two pages (single-spaced) in length, not including references. It will have a clearly articulated research question or thesis located in a scholarly context and some statement of procedure as well as an essential bibliography. Each proposal should have the potential of becoming an original, scholarly essay that contributes to the body of knowledge in the discipline. The answer to any question should be no longer than 25 double-spaced pages, not including notes and references.

Once the student's chair feels the proposals are ready for consideration by the examining committee, the student will convene the committee to prepare the examination. The chair will offer the student guidance in preparation for the meeting. The committee may use the proposal prompts as written, may rewrite the prompt, or call for additional preparation before allowing the student to take the examination.

### **Examination Administration**

After the proposals have been agreed upon by the committee, the chair of the examining committee is responsible for its administration. The examination policies and procedures are as follows:

1. The examination will be take-home. The student receives all three questions at the beginning of the examination period and all must be written within thirty (30) consecutive calendar days. All work is done independently. The student, however, may ask members of the examining committee for clarification of a question. The student may not get any assistance from any faculty member or colleague at or outside of SIU. If assistance with copy editing is needed, that decision, as well as who the copy editor will be, must be approved by the student's advisory committee.
2. The student's examining committee approves a timetable for the taking of the examination, not to exceed thirty (30) days. This timetable should be proposed by the student and approved by the committee during the preliminary examination meeting. Questions are typically emailed to the student by the advisor, and the student should email each of their completed essays, as separate documents, to the advisor and the committee members at the conclusion of the 30-day writing period. Any other arrangements must be approved by the student's committee.
3. All essay responses in the examination must be read and evaluated by each member of the examining committee. The evaluation consists of the following range: (1) Pass with distinction, (2) Pass, (3) Conditional pass requiring a rewrite, and (4) Fail.
4. While each member of the examining committee evaluates each question according to the range specified above, the committee makes a final assessment to determine the overall merit of the examination (See point 5 below). If the committee agrees that the student has failed all three questions, the examination is considered a Fail. If needed, the advisor may convene a meeting of the examining committee to discuss the examination.
5. The committee's evaluation may lead to one of three outcomes:
  - (a) If the examination is judged "Pass with distinction" or "Pass," the student is advanced to candidacy.
  - (b) If the examination is judged "Conditional pass requiring rewrite," the student is asked to write again on one or more of the same questions within three months following notification of the results of the original examination.
    - (i) If the student successfully rewrites, they are advanced into candidacy.
    - (ii) If the rewrite is judged a failure, the student is given an opportunity to take a second examination with new questions after a passage of not less than one month nor more than a year following notification of the results of the original examination. Creation of the new questions for the second examination should follow the procedure for the original examination. The second examination may be judged a "Pass" or "Fail." If evaluated as a "Pass," the student advances to candidacy. If evaluated as a "Fail," the student will not be advanced to candidacy, and the student's degree program is terminated.

- (c) If the original examination is judged a "Fail," the student is given an opportunity to take a second examination with new questions after a passage of not less than one month nor more than a year following notification of the results of the original examination. Creation of the new questions for the second examination should follow the procedure for the original examination. The second examination may be judged a "Pass," "Conditional pass requiring rewrite," or "Fail."
- (i) If evaluated as a "Pass," the student advances to candidacy.
  - (ii) If the second examination is judged "Conditional pass requiring rewrite," the student is asked to write again on one or more of the same questions within three months following notification of the results of the second examination. If the student successfully rewrites, they are advanced into candidacy.
  - (iii) If the rewrite of the second examination is judged a failure, the student will not be advanced to candidacy, and the student's degree program is terminated.
6. The examining committee will advise the student of strategies of preparation to be engaged in before the examination and for any rewrite. Guidelines pertaining to the original examination will prevail for the rewrite procedure.
  7. A majority of the recorded vote of the examining committee determines the "passing" or "failing" of any examination.
  8. The original examination must be taken within one calendar year of the semester following the completion of the student's coursework.
  9. The examining committee may require an oral examination following the written portion. Since the oral examination is optional, the content to be covered will be determined by the examining committee.
  10. The student will be informed in writing of the results of examination evaluation within three weeks after the examination is completed. A student electing to take the examinations during summer session or semester breaks will be notified of the results within three weeks of the next semester following completion of the examination. A copy of all correspondence between the examining committee and the student should be placed on file with the CMST Coordinator of Graduate Studies.
  11. The Graduate Studies Coordinator will complete a **"PhD admit to candidacy form"** (see D2L) and submit to the graduate school.
  12. The three-person advisory committee is officially dissolved after successful completion of the preliminary examination and the student will then form a five-person dissertation committee. The committee must consist of at least three members from the School of Communication Studies (including the advisor) and at least one member from outside the School. Once the dissertation committee is formed, the advisor should complete a **"PhD graduate faculty committee approval form"** (see D2L) and submit to the graduate coordinator.

## *Prospectus and Dissertation Policies and Procedures*

### Dissertation Prospectus

#### A. Content and Form of the Prospectus

1. The candidate will write a dissertation prospectus specifying (a) the subject matter to be researched, (b) the research question(s) which will be the focus of the study, (c) the research method or procedure to be employed, and (d) the basic bibliography of materials that will be consulted.
2. The dissertation prospectus should follow the same style manual (i.e., MLA or APA) as the proposed dissertation.

#### B. Prospectus Review Meeting

1. The candidate and the five-person dissertation committee, composed of at least three members from within the School of Communication Studies and at least one member from outside the School, will meet to review the dissertation prospectus and make suggestions designed to improve the study.
2. Committee members should be given the finished prospectus for review at least three weeks prior to the scheduled defense.
3. Conditions, if any, for formal approval are specified. Such conditions may include, among others not specifically mentioned, a restructuring of the study, a consideration of other research areas or materials, a pilot study to demonstrate feasibility, learning a more appropriate method, special considerations of length, etc.
4. Approval of the prospectus requires a minimum of four supporting votes from the prospectus committee.
5. If the prospectus is disapproved, a second prospectus meeting will be scheduled not sooner than one month nor later than one year from the date of disapproval.
6. If the second prospectus review meeting also results in a disapproval of the prospectus, the candidate's degree program is terminated.
7. An approved dissertation prospectus is a formal agreement between the candidate and the committee specifying the research to be pursued. Any substantive change (e.g., subject, method, procedure) in the research as originally approved requires notification and an additional meeting to obtain written approval by the committee. It is inadvisable to continue dissertation research until the revised prospectus has been reviewed and approved by the committee.
8. The prospectus is not officially approved until the Prospectus Approval Form is completed and submitted to the office of the Coordinator of Graduate Studies. See "[Prospectus Approval Form PhD](#)" on D2L.



## Dissertation

### A. Content and Form of the Dissertation

1. The dissertation is the candidate's demonstration of an ability to pursue and complete original research in the Communication Studies discipline; it is completed in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree.
2. The dissertation is the logical extension and systematic completion of the subject matter and research procedure approved at the prospectus meeting.
3. Questions of style are specified by reference to the standard style manual guiding the study and the latest edition of the [Graduate School Guidelines for the Preparation of Research Reports, Theses, and Dissertations](#).
4. The dissertation committee will be the same as the dissertation prospectus committee unless a committee member leaves the University or elects to resign from the committee. If a committee member change is necessitated, a new "PhD graduate faculty committee approval form" (see D2L) must be completed and submitted to the graduate coordinator.

### B. Dissertation Defense Meeting

1. Committee members should be given the finished document for review at least three weeks prior to the scheduled defense.
2. The candidate and the dissertation committee will meet to review and discuss the dissertation. Notice of the defense should be posted at least one week prior to the meeting, via digital and/or paper announcement within the School of Communication Studies, and via notice given to the Graduate School by the advisor. All defenses are open to the scholarly community but only members of the dissertation committee may vote or make recommendations concerning the acceptance of the dissertation.
3. Conditions, if any, for formal approval are specified. Such conditions may include, among others not specifically mentioned, a brief addition to the study, a consideration of other research areas or materials, alterations in style or grammar, etc. Committee members may request that they see any revisions before approving the dissertation or may ask that a second defense be held.
4. Approval of the dissertation requires a minimum of four supporting votes from the committee of five. In cases where a committee of more than five members has been approved by the Graduate Dean, the requirement of not more than one negative vote will still apply.
5. The dissertation is not officially accepted until all paperwork is completed and filed with the Graduate School. Submission procedures are specified in [SIU Graduate Catalog](#) and on the [final paper submission procedures website](#).
6. Both the "Dissertation Approval Form" and the "PhD Oral Defense Form" must be submitted to the graduate school by the dissertation advisor and graduate coordinator. Forms can be found on D2L.
7. It is imperative that the student be responsible for meeting the deadlines set forth by the graduate school. See the "dates and deadlines" section of the [Graduate School resources page](#), and "schedule for completion" section on p. 10 of this handbook.



## **Miscellaneous Policies**

### Reading time for various documents

Graduate students present their committees and advisors with various documents during the course of their studies. In an effort to bring about some common understanding about how long the committee has to turn various documents around, the following may be considered as guidelines:

Reading time for prelim proposals for prelim committee meeting – 2 weeks prior to meeting

Reading time for prelim essays – 3 weeks from submission of exam essays\*

Reading time for dissertation prospectus – 3 weeks prior to defense date

Reading time for dissertations – 3 weeks prior to defense date

\*Note: For prelim exams taken over the summer or winter breaks, reading time starts at the beginning of the fall and spring semesters, respectively. Also, it is recommended that during regular semesters, the student complete prelims before the last three weeks of the semester. In this way, results can be available before the end of the semester. That is, if the student passes, candidacy and CMST 600 credits can also be earned for that semester.

Additionally, to avoid a last week rush of defenses, it is suggested that the student work with the advisor to figure out what type of timeline is necessary to meet graduation deadlines for the fall, spring and summer. Faculty are not neither required nor expected to be available for meetings in the summer if they are not on contract.

### Second semester reviews

In an effort to avoid an end-of-the-spring-semester flurry of second semester review meetings, along with other committee meetings and defenses, it is suggested that all second semester reviews be completed by the end of March. (This time is suggested since the month of April is occupied with regional conferences which makes availability difficult).

### Schedule for Completion

If you wish to graduate in May, you should be aware of the amount of time needed to meet your deadline. Count backwards to see when you must complete your work in order to graduate:

- The Graduate School deadline for May graduation is typically around the second Friday in April. Let's say **APRIL 12**. This deadline is for all materials to be deposited with the Graduate School, after all revisions have been made and accepted by the committee, after the defense, and including any committee paperwork. (Note that the graduate school also requires an initial submission of your document, so they can check formatting. The deadline for this initial submission is one week prior to final submission, or in our scenario, **APRIL 5**.)
- Figure at least one week for revisions from your defense. Now you're back to **APRIL 5** as the last day to have a defense (which gives you one week prior to the hypothetical April 12 submission deadline).
- You must give your committee at least three weeks to read your document. If you defend on April 5, then in this scenario, you must have your dissertation to your committee by **MARCH 15**; however, that typically falls in spring break, and so you may want to figure on having your dissertation to the committee by **MARCH 8**.

- After you have completed all the revisions that your advisor has asked you to do, it is not uncommon for an advisor to want to read your document one more time before giving you approval to go to committee. Assume your advisor will take two or three weeks to read the whole. You are now at **FEBRUARY 16** as the date by which you should have your complete draft to your advisor.

(Please remember this is a hypothetical scenario, meant to illustrate that you only have a short amount of time to actually write during the semester in which you want to graduate.)

Such a timetable should be easily transferred for either fall or summer graduation. You need about two months time after you think you have finished writing your document. Notice too that summer defenses are only allowed if all members of your committee agree to meet. Since most of our faculty members are not on contract during the summer, you should not expect that everyone will be available or willing to meet. Another complicating factor is holidays. You should not expect faculty to read your work during holiday breaks.

#### *Policy for handling graduate committees during faculty sabbaticals and other extended faculty leave*

In recognition of the additional complications on faculty advising and graduate committee service brought about by such factors as sabbatical leaves or other extended absences from routine availability, and in order to permit appropriate and timely progress toward degree completion for students, additional flexibility in conducting graduate committee work is necessary. In extended cases such as these, when a faculty committee member is unavailable, and with the assent of the student's advisor, the school will seek to make reasonable accommodations as follows:

1. Second semester review for doctoral students: the two remaining advisory committee members may comprise a sufficient number.
2. Preliminary exam meeting: the two remaining advisory committee members may comprise a sufficient number for the purpose of approving, formulating, and administering questions for the exam.
3. Preliminary exam assessment: the two remaining advisory committee members may comprise a sufficient number for the purpose of reading the exams. In the event that one or both of these members find that a third faculty member's assessment is warranted, the faculty may select a third member in consultation with the Coordinator of Graduate Studies.
4. Dissertation defense: If a committee member is on sabbatical/leave, then that person may be replaced (with appropriate permission) or they may send their comments in writing to the advisor if they wish to do so. Only four supporting committee member signatures are needed to approve a dissertation.

#### *Policy Regarding Appointment of Graduate Assistants / Graduate Students as Instructors of Record*

All graduate student TAs with appropriate master's degrees and suitable prior experience will be eligible to teach 100, 200 and 300 level courses as Instructors of Record. They will be trained, mentored, and supervised by a faculty supervisor.

Extensive first-year and ongoing training and mentoring is provided to all GAs, whether they are Instructors of Record or working with a Faculty Member of Record. Details are available in the School's GTA Handbook

It is reasonable to expect a basic level of etiquette from your students (e.g., coming to class having read the readings and completed required assignments, using mobile devices when applicable to course

content, arriving to class on time and staying the whole time, etc.). You should plan to model this same etiquette in the classes in which you are a student (i.e., your graduate coursework).

Be sure to closely read the School of Communication Studies Graduate Teaching Associate Handbook for comprehensive policies, supports, and expectations while you are on an assistantship.

Please note that, prior to each semester, you will be asked for your schedule and preferences for teaching days and times. Your graduate teaching assistantship duties are primary. While the Introductory Course Coordinator does their best to meet all teaching schedule preferences, in general, they cannot work around volunteer commitments and other employment. However, they will always be sure to avoid scheduling your teaching classes at a time when you are a student in a class.

### *Policy on Timesheets*

All graduate students on assistantship, fellowship, or receiving the Dissertation Research Award (DRA) are required by the State of Illinois to complete timesheets recording their work hours each week. Instructions on how to complete the timesheets, as well as the timesheet form, can be found by visiting the [Graduate School's forms page](#), and scrolling down to "other forms."

### *Professional Development*

Throughout the academic year, the School sponsors professional development seminars, or "prosems," for short. At the most, prosems take place once a month, generally on a Friday at 4:00 PM. Some are virtual, some are in person, some are optional modality. Prosems may consist of a research presentation, an alumni visit and panel, a grant-writing workshop, etc. They are intended to provide necessarily professional development opportunities for graduate students.

Graduate students are required to attend prosems. If you are not able to attend any given prosem, you are expected to alert the graduate coordinator.