



# MA Handbook



SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY  
**SCHOOL OF  
COMMUNICATION STUDIES**

## GUIDELINES FOR MASTERS 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, final degree projects 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 participants must receive clearance from the SIUC Human Subjects Committee *prior* to the involvement of those participants. For needed forms, see the [Institutional Review Board](#) website.

### *Master's Degree Programs*

A minimum of 30 semester credit hours is required for the M.A. degree. At least fifteen of these hours must be at the 500 level<sup>1</sup>. A student who completes only a minimum of 30 hours of course work may devote no more than 9 hours to work outside the School of Communication Studies. All MA students are required to take CMST 501 in their first fall semester. MA students assigned to teach must also take CMST 539 in their first fall semester.

The individual student is assigned a temporary faculty facilitator for the first semester and then will select an advisor early in the second semester. The faculty advisor and the student will plan the program of study and identify possible committee members. Once the committee is formed, the student and advisor should complete the “**MA advisory committee form**” (for research report or coursework completion options) or the “**thesis graduate faculty committee approval form**” (for thesis completion option). Both forms can be found on D2L.

Requirements for the Master’s degree include required and elective coursework, along with a culminating project, depending upon the specific plan identified by the student and advisor. Each plan is outlined below.

**Plan 1: Thesis.** Each student must complete a minimum of 30 semester credit hours, which includes no more than 6 hours or fewer than 3 hours of thesis credit in CMST 599. The advisory committee composed of three members of the graduate faculty (at least two of whom must be from the School of

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<sup>1</sup> While students may take courses offered at the 400 level for graduate credit, they must always check to make sure these courses are currently listed in the graduate catalog (not just the undergraduate catalog). If a 400-level course is NOT listed in the graduate catalog, it will not count as graduate credit hours. Starting Fall 2026, graduate students are not permitted to take 400-level courses.

Communication Studies), must first approve the prospectus (and advisor should complete the “**prospectus approval form MA**”). The thesis is submitted to the advisory committee; the committee will administer an oral examination over the thesis in a thesis defense meeting. The thesis defense is an open meeting. Upon completing the thesis and passing the thesis defense, the advisor should complete the “**MA oral defense form**” and “**thesis approval form**” (both found on D2L). Students are required to submit electronic copies of their thesis as required by the graduate school.

**Plan 2: Research Report.** Each student must complete a minimum of 30 semester hours, including no more than 3 or fewer than 1 hour of research report credit in CMST 595. A research report is submitted as evidence of research competence. An advisory committee, consisting of the student's advisor and one other member of the School of Communication Studies, will administer an oral examination over the research report in a research report defense meeting. The research report defense meeting is not an open meeting. Students are required to submit electronic copies of their research report as required by the graduate school. Upon completing the research report and passing the research report defense, the student's advisor should complete the “**research report approval form**” (found on D2L) and submit it to the graduate coordinator.

**Plan 3: Coursework only.** Each student must complete a minimum of 30 credit hours. Students must select the coursework only option during their second semester review held during the second semester of their first year of coursework. While not required, students choosing the coursework only option can request to take an independent study (up to 3 credit hours) during their final semester with a graduate faculty member of their choice (and upon agreement from the faculty member) during which they complete a professional practice final project in line with their future career plans. This project may take the form of a training workshop, a research presentation/talk, a performance, a podcast, or some other format approved and chosen in consultation with the student's advisory committee. Completion of the project would result in a public presentation to the student's advisory committee and other invited faculty and graduate students in the School of Communication Studies.

All M.A. students must have a cumulative graduate grade point average of 3.00 in order to be eligible for the degree.

### Second semester review

Early in the second semester of coursework, the student and the advisory committee will meet for the second semester review. During this meeting, the student and the committee will discuss the student's progress towards the degree, completion plan selection (based on options outlined above), plans for after graduation, and other related matters. Prior to the meeting, the student and advisor should complete the “**MA second semester review form**” (found on D2L) and send it to the committee at least one week in advance.

A summary of Master's degree requirements follows:

1. At least 30 hours of graduate credit, only 9 of which may be from outside the School.
2. At least 15 credit hours in courses numbered 500 or above, which must be completed at SIUC.
3. Thesis, research report, or coursework only completion option (identified during the second semester review).
4. Grade point average of 3.00.

If granted, assistantship funding for Master's level students is for two academic years, assuming satisfactory progress toward the degree. A full-time load for students with an assistantship is at least 8 credit hours (CH) and a maximum of 12 CH. Given this per-semester minimum credit hour load, students on an assistantship are likely to complete more than the 30 credit hour minimum for the MA degree.

Additionally, students on assistantship during the summer are required to register for a minimum of 3 CH of coursework.

If a student is on an assistantship and is in their final (graduating) semester, the Graduate Assistants United collective bargaining agreement allows students to register for 6 graduate credit hours. The graduate school must receive a request memo from the student's advisor, during the semester prior to the final semester. According to the Graduate School, the student will be seen as part-time by the university, but this will not affect their stipend or tuition waiver. Before international students can consider this, they must first check in with Center for International Education to make sure this will not affect their visa status and also complete a reduced course load form. (See the School of CMST Graduate Coordinator for assistance with the reduced course load form.) If the exception is taken and the student does not graduate for some reason, the next semester they must enroll in 8 graduate credit hours, if they remain on assistantship. The last semester 6-hour exception is a one-time exception.

A full-time load for students not on assistantship is 6 credit hours minimum.

In order to complete the program in two years, the following course schedule is recommended for a graduate student on assistantship or fellowship, and who wishes to complete a research report or thesis<sup>2</sup>:

Semester	Course	Credit Hrs	Notes
Fall, year 1	CMST 539	3	Required of all TAs in their first semester at SIU
	CMST 501	3	Required of all first-year MA and PhD
	CMST xxx	3	
<b>Credit hours total</b>		<b>9</b>	
Spring, year 1	CMST xxx	3	
	CMST xxx	3	
	CMST xxx	3	
<b>Credit hours total</b>		<b>18</b>	
Summer, year 1	CMST xxx	3	Optional, though required if on assistantship
<b>Credit hours total</b>		<b>21</b>	
Fall, year 2	CMST xxx	3	
	CMST xxx	3	
	CMST xxx (or 599)	3	599 for those writing a thesis
<b>Credit hours total</b>		<b>30</b>	
Spring, year 2	CMST xxx	3	
	CMST xxx (or 599 or 595)	3	599 for those writing thesis, 595 for those writing research report
<b>Credit hours total</b>		<b>36</b>	

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<sup>2</sup> Students on assistantship/fellowship are advised to take no more than 9 hours their first semester of study. To complete work within two years, each student is encouraged to provide faculty with sufficient time for the administration and evaluation of their research report or thesis. *After six years from the start date, all M.A. students will complete three courses in the school to establish currency.*



Once a student completes all coursework and is still working on their thesis or research report, past the second semester of their second year, they must enroll in 1 credit hour of CMST 601 (continuing enrollment) every semester until graduation. This applies only if the student is no longer on an assistantship/fellowship. If the student is on an assistantship/fellowship, then they should work with their advisor to identify 8 credit hours of coursework (may include independent study-type courses) in order to remain on their assistantship. If the student has not yet taken advantage of the 6-credit hour final semester exception (see p. 4), they may do so during the graduating semester of their first year.

Extensions of funding (beyond 2nd year for MA students) are tied to both School needs and adequate academic progress, which the graduate school requires us to document. Additionally, the graduate school rarely extends funding beyond one year.

## ***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 School has established **3 weeks prior to defense/presentation date** as the guideline for reading time for thesis prospectus, thesis, research report, and capstone materials (if applicable).

Additionally, to avoid a last week rush of defenses, the student should 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 neither required nor expected to be available for meetings in the summer if they are not on contract. (See "Schedule for Completion" section below.)

Please note that because of deadlines set by the graduate school, those completing a research report or thesis should plan to have their document completed and submitted to the committee within the first 4-6 weeks of the semester in which they want to graduate. In general, a student should plan to defend their document by the middle of the graduating semester in order to have time for revisions and submission to graduate school. (See "Schedule for Completion" section below.)

### ***Second semester reviews***

In an effort to avoid an end-of-the-spring-semester flurry of second semester 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).

Given this, a second semester (of the first year) might look something like this:

- By February 15, request a graduate faculty member to be your advisor
- By March 1, secure a committee (1 additional person for research report or coursework only, 2 additional people for thesis)
- By spring break, have second semester review scheduled for late March, and "**MA second semester review form**" sent to committee
- By April 1, second semester review is completed, and signed "**MA second semester review form**" sent to graduate coordinator

### ***Schedule for Completion***

If you wish to graduate in May, and are completing a thesis or research report, 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 week 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 after 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 document to your committee by **MARCH 15**; however, that typically falls during spring break, and so you may want to figure on having your document 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 the green light 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 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: The faculty member on sabbatical/leave may be represented by another faculty member. The student should work with their advisor to decide who the representative should be. (Ideally, when choosing a committee members, you would first know who will likely be on sabbatical during your program, and you would consider *not* asking them to be on your committee.)
2. Prospectus/Thesis/Research Report oral defense: The faculty member on sabbatical/leave may be replaced with appropriate permission. (Ideally, when choosing a committee members, you would first know who will likely be on sabbatical during your program, and you would consider *not* asking them to be on your committee.)

#### *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. Master's students with bachelor's degrees only will not teach as Instructors of Record. Instead, they will be eligible to work with a Faculty Member of Record for a course. (For example, the Introductory Course Coordinator serves as the instructor of record for all CMST 101 sections taught by a graduate student who has not yet completed a master's degree.)

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.