

Graduate Program Handbook

MA and PhD in Communication Programs

School of Journalism and Communication

Carleton University

2025-2026

This handbook is revised regularly as Grad Studies policies and procedures evolve and change.

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Introduction

Welcome to The School of Journalism and Communication and the Communication and Media Studies graduate programs! [COMS at Carleton](#) is one of Canada's longest standing Communication and Media Studies programs. You are now part of a long and continuing tradition of rigorous and impactful scholarship, teaching, and public engagement.

Whether you are a new MA or PhD student, a continuing graduate student, or a faculty colleague looking for guidance about aspects of the degree program, this handbook is for you.

This handbook cannot and does not address every question or concern; it is more of a snapshot of policies and procedures. The authoritative guide to the rules and regulations, timeline, registration, and so on for graduate students and degree programs is the [Graduate Calendar](#) with degree requirements for [Communication Studies](#) and then [Grad Studies](#) policies that govern all aspects of graduate degree programs at Carleton.

Advice & Support

The **Graduate Program Administrator** is Laura Gareau, and she is your main contact person for administrative issues (registration, funding, TA assignments, thesis submission, etc.).
Laura.Gareau@carleton.ca Room 4302 C, Richcraft Hall

The **Graduate Program Supervisor** is Prof. Sandra Robinson, an associate professor in communication and media studies, and she is your main contact person in academic matters such as to address questions or concerns about electives outside the program, finding a supervisor, funding questions, and issues that arise throughout your degree that are of an academic nature. Sandra.Robinson@carleton.ca Room 4317, Richcraft Hall.

Other department contacts

Prof. Liam Young, Program Head, Communication and Media Studies
Co-Director, School of Journalism & Communication
Room 4302 A, Richcraft Hall
Liam.Young@carleton.ca

Prof. Mary Francoli, Undergraduate Supervisor, Room 4317, Richcraft Hall
Mary.Francoli@carleton.ca

Frequently Used Acronyms

SJC – School of Journalism & Communication
FPGA – Faculty of Public & Global Affairs
GS – Grad Studies
GSA – Graduate Student Association
CGC – Communication Graduate Caucus
SSHRC – Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council
OGS – Ontario Graduate Scholarship

CGS – Canada Graduate Scholarships – master's program
CIHR – Canadian Institutes of Health Research
ABD – all but dissertation
GPA – Grade Point Average
ETD – electronic thesis deposit
WBC – COMS Writing Boot Camp

Department information, resources, and supports

Graduate Office & Desk Space

Secure, shared graduate desk space is available and is normally assigned in the fall. Please contact Laura, the Graduate Administrator, for room information. You will need to **enable your Campus Card with a PIN** by accessing the [Web Card Centre](#) for access to offices and seminar room once you are on campus: see here to set this up.

If you are working late, please consider using the [Safe Walk Program](#) for company to walk to your OC Transpo stop, Uber/Lyft, or your own bicycle or vehicle. There is also a [Working After Hours Program](#) offered by Campus Safety, which we encourage you to participate in if you regularly work late. For both these programs, **call 613-520-3612**.

Carleton Accounts

If you are new to Carleton, the first thing you should do is activate your MyCarletonOne account through Carleton Central. [Activating](#) your account grants you access to your official Carleton email account and to other [IT services](#). As a CU grad student, you also have access to the [Microsoft 365](#) suite.

The Resource Centre

The Resource Centre, at 4400 Richcraft Hall, provides students, faculty, staff and researchers a collegial environment in which to meet, study, collaborate, research, or just relax. There are small meeting rooms that can be reserved through this [link](#).

Communication Graduate Caucus

All Communication graduate students are automatically members of the CGC. The CGC organizes an annual communication graduate conference and represents student interests to the Department and the Graduate Students Association (GSA). www.cgccarleton.ca.

Faculty Mentor Program

In August, just prior to the start of the fall semester, incoming grad students will be assigned a temporary Faculty Mentor by the Graduate Supervisor. The Faculty Mentor is not the supervisor of your thesis or research paper and there is no expectation that they would be rather they provide support to students to orient them around the intellectual culture and research life of the program and provide early advice on applying for external funding.

Professional Development Sessions

There will be opportunities to engage in Grad Studies [professional development](#) activities as well as departmental PD workshops and training for grad students. The department hosts research talks and other scholarly activity, which we expect all grad students to participate in as part of your professional and scholarly development. Notifications are sent by email.

Writing Bootcamp

The COMS Writing Boot Camp (WBC) is an intensive two-day workshop for COMS graduate students and faculty designed to focus on the practice of academic writing. We normally plan a fall and a spring WBC every year and it is open to all faculty and graduate students in the program with no limits on annual attendance.

Academic accommodations, equity services, and support links

Academic Accommodations and Students with Disabilities

If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations, or if you would like to talk to someone about your situation that may require formal academic accommodation, please contact the [Paul Menton Centre](#) for Students with Disabilities pmc@carleton.ca.

Equity and Inclusive Communities (EIC)

[EIC](#) fosters the development of an inclusive and transformational university culture. If you have equity related concerns, you can reach out first over email: equity@carleton.ca.

Survivors of Sexual Violence

As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and its survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per [Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy](#).

Trans and Non-Binary Information*

Carleton continues to work towards an inclusive campus and has a Trans and Non-Binary Inclusion Coordinator who works with community members, student, staff, and faculty, and consults with [Carleton's Trans Advocacy Group](#) and supports the [Trans Resource Hub](#). You can find bathroom locations [here](#).

Mental Health and Well Being

<https://carleton.ca/sjc/communication/student-support-and-wellness-2/>

Graduate Studies

This links to resources, regulations, policies, forms, and other resources maintained by [Grad Studies](#).

Graduate Students' Association (GSA)

The GSA offers grants for a range of situations, including a Childcare Grant, Family Leave Grant, Health Leave Grant, and others. See the [GSA website](#) for more information.

Campus Safety

Please be familiar with the services offered by [Campus Safety](#) and, again, the [Safe Walk Program](#) and [Working After Hours Program](#).

Emergency on campus? Call Campus Safety Services 613-520-4444 or 4444 from any campus phone.

Graduate Student Funding

Only full-time students are eligible for funding as a university TA and/or RA and may apply for external or internal awards, and/or donor awards. For all grad students, continuation of funding from year to year is dependent upon satisfactory academic performance (B- is the minimum permitted for a course credit) and full-time registration. At the MA level, teaching assistantships are renewable for four terms. At the PhD level, teaching assistantships are renewable for up to ten terms over five consecutive calendar years. You can apply to be considered for a priority TA extension using this [form](#) after you've exceeded your funding, but these extensions are rarely available and reviewed by the Dean's Office.

Students are not eligible to receive payments if they withdraw completely from their graduate program, change to part-time status, or are granted a leave of absence from their program. In the case of backdated withdrawals, students may have to refund scholarship payments already received.

External Awards

For [external awards](#) from the Tri-Council (OGS, SSHRC, CIHR), workshops hosted by Communication Studies are offered in the late summer (for PhD students) and/or fall (for MA students) for external awards. We will be in touch by email before the workshops. Please note the deadline dates vary each academic year and are different for MA and PhD students. The deadlines are posted by Grad Studies, [Funding and Awards](#).

Donor-Funded Awards

Donor-funded awards are financial awards and are provided by an individual or organization to Carleton. They are administered by Carleton with deadlines in either the fall or winter and are awarded based on academic merit, financial need and/or specific research areas. More information on these awards can be found at Grad Studies, [Funding and Awards](#).

Grad Studies Graduate Student Travel / Research Bursary

Grad Studies provides modest funds to students who require assistance to conduct or present their research. See the terms and application requirements of the bursary [here](#).

COMS Student Research Support Fund (SRSF)

Funding to defray costs associated with conducting or disseminating research for a B.CoMS Honours Research Essay, MA Research Essay, MA Thesis, or Doctoral Dissertation. Eligible expenses include direct costs for reference materials, equipment, training, honoraria to research participants, or travel. Students submit applications for funding from the SRSF to the Graduate Administrator. Applications must clearly articulate the research project, justify the activities to be funded, and outline both anticipated costs and other sources of funding, if any. Applications should not exceed two pages in length.

Funding decisions are made by the COMS Awards Committee, which may fund an application in whole or in part. The SRSF contains \$7,500 per fiscal year (April–March) and accepts applications on a rolling basis. In order to ensure funds remain available over the year, the Awards Committee will not approve more than \$4,000 for all student research support funding requests before September. Students approved for SRSF funding must retain receipts to be reimbursed. Receipts go to [@Laura Gareau](#), Graduate Administrator.

PhD year 5 completion bursary

Please enquire with the Graduate Supervisor for information about this funding. This bursary is contingent on funds made available through FPGA each year and is not guaranteed.

Graduate Program Information: MA Communication

→ For PhD Communication program information jump [here](#).

There are three routes to the MA Communication degree: coursework, research essay (MRE), or thesis. If you elect to take a collaborative specialization, your pathway and requirements will be slightly different. See the links below for specific courses and requirements.

Coursework option

The **coursework option** is very popular with students and maximizes your contact with a wide range of faculty members and topics. This option is as substantive as the MRE or thesis. You do not require a supervisor if you pursue this option. The coursework option does not preclude you from pursuing a PhD in the future.

MA Research Essay & Thesis options

Students considering either the MRE or thesis, should think about their research objectives and what they hope to achieve through a more intensive research experience. The **research essay** option enables you to combine more breadth in your course work with a smaller scale research project (approximately 50-60 pages). The **thesis** option affords a more expansive and guided research on a project (approximately 90-110 pages). A research essay should reflect a substantive interpretation of the field(s) studied whereas the thesis should represent a more distinct contribution to the field, based on primary research.

MA Program Requirements

The specific requirements for the MA are as follows (for the collaborative specializations see [here](#)):¹

Required for all students:

COMS 5101 Foundations of Communication Studies (1.0 credit, Fall and Winter terms)

COMS 5605 Approaches to Communication Research (0.5 credit)

Then, one of these pathways:

- Coursework option: 3.5 credits chosen from the list of elective courses noted below.
- Research Essay option: (1.0 credit) and 2.5 credits chosen from the list of elective courses.
- MA thesis option (2.0 credits): and 1.5 credits from the list of elective courses below.

Electives (not all electives are available every term)

COMS 5102, 5200, 5202, 5203, 5205, 5206, 5207, 5208, 5209, 5212, 5214, 5218, 5219, 5220, 5221, 5222, 5223, 5224, 5225, 5509, 5808

- Students may take one optional (elective) course (0.5 credit) outside the program, with permission of the graduate supervisor.
- In very exceptional circumstances, students in the M.A. program are permitted to take one directed studies course with permission of the graduate supervisor, COMS 5808 (0.5 credit).

Course descriptions can be found [here](#).

Academic Standing

A standing of B- or better must be obtained in each credit counted towards the master's degree.

¹ Note: Students are responsible for knowing and following regulations in the Carleton [Graduate Calendar](#).

MA Specializations

The MA Communication offers four collaborative specializations. You can review the different requirements by clicking on the links below. Please see the Graduate Administrator to add a specialization to your program.

MA Communication with Specialization in African Studies

Course requirements and information about MRE or thesis options are [here](#).

Course descriptions can be found [here](#).

MA Communication with Collaborative Specialization in Latin American and Caribbean Studies

Course requirements and information about MRE or thesis options are [here](#).

Course descriptions can be found [here](#).

MA Communication with Collaborative Specialization in Climate Change

Course requirements and information about MRE or thesis options are [here](#).

Course descriptions can be found [here](#).

MA Communication with Specialization in Data Science

Course requirements and information about coursework, MRE, or thesis options are [here](#).

Course descriptions can be found [here](#).

Master's Research Essay (MRE) and MA Thesis Requirements

MRE Requirements

The MA research essay (MRE) should be 50-60 pages max plus references. Some supervisors will require a brief outline or short proposal of the research. It's important to clarify the process with your supervisor. You complete the MRE in your second year along with your remaining coursework. The MRE is assessed by your supervisor and a second reader. Once students have a MRE supervisor, they should complete the **supervisory agreement** (see [Appendix I](#)) and then send it to the Graduate Administrator.

Once the MRE is graded and returned in the later part of the Winter term of your second year, any outstanding corrections outlined by the supervisor and second reader must be made. No license is required for the MRE and there is no formal submission process required for the document. It is the student's responsibility to have a digital copy of the MRE (including title page) emailed to the department's graduate administrator for archiving once the MRE is graded and complete. You may adapt the [thesis title page format](#) for your MRE. Your document format should follow recommendations in the APA style manual or an agreed upon style using formatting conventions in MS Word. Please discuss MRE structure and citation style with your supervisor and format accordingly.

The established timeline is to submit the completed MRE with the Graduate Administrator by April 30.

MA Thesis Requirements

Students should have completed all coursework prior to starting the thesis work and have a supervisor and together you can consider who would be a good second committee member, based on research alignment, from our unit.

MA Thesis Proposal

In discussion with your thesis supervisor, you must prepare a thesis proposal and receive feedback from

your supervisor and second committee member before starting work on your thesis. Your thesis proposal should have a working title and should be approximately 3500- 4000 words long. Its main purpose is to tell the committee what you are going to do in your thesis and how you are going to do it. It is not an essay. You will be required to work on the proposal under the guidance of your supervisor with input from your second committee member as needed. Please see [Appendix III](#) for MA proposal guidelines.

MA Thesis

The MA thesis should be 90-110 pages plus references. Guidelines for the preparation of graduate theses are available here: [thesis cover page template](#) and [formatting guidelines](#). Your document format should follow recommendations in the APA style manual or an agreed upon style using formatting conventions in MS Word. Please discuss thesis structure and citation style with your supervisor and format accordingly.

Timeline for MA Students: Coursework, MRE, or Thesis

Normal progress and deadlines over the course of a full time MA are noted in the table below. If you have added a specialization, your requirements may differ.

MA	Coursework	Research Essay	Thesis
Year 1			
Fall term	COMS 5101 (Fall & Winter), and two optional COMS 5xxx course electives.	COMS 5101 (Fall & Winter), and two optional COMS 5xxx course electives.	COMS 5101 (Fall & Winter), and two optional COMS 5xxx course electives.
Winter term	Continue coursework. COMS 5101, and two other courses, one of which is COMS 5605. Advise Grad Supervisor & Grad Administrator of your program choice.	Continue coursework. COMS 5101, and two other courses, one of which is COMS 5605. Arrange formal meeting with a potential supervisor about proposed research essay. Fill in the supervisory form and send to Grad Administrator.	Continue coursework. COMS 5101, and two other courses, one of which is COMS 5605. Arrange formal meeting with a potential supervisor about proposed thesis research. Complete the MA Supervisor Authorization form and submit to the Grad Administrator.
Summer term	Coursework students should try to take a 0.5 credit elective course over the summer.	Begin work on MRE outline in discussion with your supervisor. You may decide to take a 0.5 credit course over the summer.	Begin work on your thesis proposal in discussion with your supervisor.
Year 2			
Fall term	Continue coursework.	Complete coursework and register for COMS 5908 (MRP). Second formal meeting with supervisor, submit research essay outline.	Register for COMS 5909 (thesis). Second formal meeting with supervisor, submit thesis proposal.

MA	Coursework	Research Essay	Thesis
January	Continue coursework.	Third formal meeting with supervisor. Full draft of research essay for review recommended.	Third formal meeting with supervisor. Full draft of thesis for review recommended.
Feb-March	Continue coursework.	Meetings with supervisor for revisions. Deadline to submit is last day of classes.	Meetings with supervisor for revisions and thesis examination date.
April	Apply to graduate by April 1st. Contact the Grad Administrator for details.	Apply to graduate by April 1st. Contact the Grad Administrator for details.	Apply to graduate by April 1st. Complete Academic Integrity Statement and complete license forms. Upload thesis exam copy and prepare for defence. Contact the Grad Administrator for more details.
April- early May			Thesis Defence NOTE: Last date to submit electronic thesis copy for deposit and June convocation is often as early as the end of the first week of May.
June	Convocation	Convocation	Convocation
August/Summer	*End of time for program completion see Grad Administrator. Apply for an extension if necessary.	*End of time for program completion see Grad Administrator. Apply for an extension if necessary.	*End of time for program completion see Grad Administrator. Apply for an extension if necessary.
September (for MA students who have extended work into the Summer term)	Apply to graduate by August 31.	Apply to graduate by August 31.	Apply to graduate by August 31.

MA Thesis Examination Process

If you are in the MA thesis option, the defence process is detailed in the Grad Studies [thesis examination policy](#). Students and supervisor must be familiar with the policy. This policy has important information about the timeline in the weeks leading up to the defence date. Students and their supervisor must consult with the Graduate Administrator once the student is close to thesis completion to ensure they adhere to Grad Studies examination guidelines and policy. What follows below is only a summary of the exam policy and process.

Thesis Submission

- After appropriate reviews, the candidate and the supervisor inform the department of the date they intend to submit the thesis. This **notice shall be given at least two weeks before the submission date** (e.g. notify the Grad Administrator that the student is getting close to having final thesis complete).
- The candidate is required to upload the examination copy of their thesis through Carleton Central **at least three weeks before the examination date**.
- The candidate must accept the Academic Integrity Thesis Statement on Carleton Central indicating comprehension of and adherence to the Carleton University Academic Integrity Policy.

The examination board (committee) will include your thesis supervisor, second reader, and an examiner from outside the unit, but from Carleton, plus a chair of the defence. The thesis supervisor schedules the examination with the help of the Graduate Administrator. In practice in COMS, for MA defences, the supervisor finds an examiner from outside the unit and with no prior relationship to the MA candidate and proposes some dates for the defence and then advises the Graduate Administrator.

- Grad Studies has stipulated that all MA thesis defences are in-person at Carleton University. Only in exceptional circumstances will Zoom defences be allowed as of 2025.
- MA thesis defences are a maximum of two hours.
- This process is outlined in more detail in the Grad Studies thesis examination policy for MA defences.

The examination (defence) process is detailed [here](#). Supervisors and students should review this process. An appointed Chair governs the defence and will carefully outline it at the start of the examination (defence).

Please note: A thesis deposit cannot be considered complete until it is authorized by your thesis supervisor. It is best to keep in contact with your supervisor to ensure they have sufficient time to review and approve your uploaded copy in order to meet the thesis deposit deadlines for registration and Convocation.

Graduate Program Information: PhD Communication

NOTE: For PhD students who joined the program prior to 2025, please consult [Appendix VI](#) for program details and second comprehensive guidelines.

For PhD students joining the program as of September 2025, the specific requirements are listed in the [Graduate Calendar](#). Doctoral candidates must successfully complete the equivalent of 5.0 credits. There is one collaborative specialization available in Political Economy (see below).

Dissertation committee: A dissertation committee for the comprehensive and proposal phases includes the supervisor and two committee members from the program (and can include cross appointed faculty, adjunct professor, adjunct research professor). Committee members from outside the unit can be on the committee if necessary. At the time of the dissertation defence, an examination board is set with additional external and internal examiners. See the policy [here](#).

Ph.D. student progress is reviewed annually by Grad Studies.

PhD Communication program requirements

(for new students as of Fall 2025)

All students (part-time and full-time) must take COMS 6000 in their first year.

Requirements

1. 1.0 credit in:	1.0
COMS 6000 [1.0] Doctoral Seminar in Communication Studies	
2. 2.0 credits from the list of electives below; up to 0.5 credit may be taken in a relevant discipline outside of the School; students in the Ph.D. program are restricted to one (0.5 credit) directed studies course:	2.0
COMS 6010 [0.5] Directed Studies	
3. 2.0 credits in:	2.0
COMS 6101 [0.5] Comprehensive Exam: Field I	
COMS 6102 [0.5] Comprehensive Exam: Field II	
COMS 6908 [1.0] Ph.D. Thesis Proposal	
4. 0.0 credits in:	0.0
COMS 6909 [0.0] Ph.D. Thesis (must be successfully defended at an oral examination)	
Total Credits	5.0

Elective course list is [here](#). Only a few courses are offered each year based on faculty availability and course planning.

PhD Communication with Specialization in Political Economy

*Please consult with the Graduate Supervisor and see the Graduate Administrator to add this to your program. This specialization is also 5.0 credits.

Please note that PECO 6000 – Political Economy: Core Concepts, a required course for the students in the specialization in Political Economy, will only be offered every second year rather than annually. Please consult the course schedule or check with the [Institute of Political Economy](#) to confirm the course offering.

All students (part-time and full-time) must take COMS 6000 in their first year.

Requirements

1. 1.0 credit in:	1.0
COMS 6000 [1.0] Doctoral Seminar in Communication Studies	
2. 1.0 additional credit from the list of optional courses below: up to 0.5 credit may be taken in a relevant discipline outside of the School; students in the Ph.D. program are restricted to 0.5 credit in directed studies: COMS 6010 Directed Studies	1.0
3. 2.0 credits in:	2.0
COMS 6101 [0.5] Comprehensive Exam: Field I	
COMS 6102 [0.5] Comprehensive Exam: Field II	
COMS 6908 [1.0] Ph.D. Thesis Proposal	
4. 0.5 credit in:	0.5
PECO 6000 [0.5] Political Economy: Core Concepts	
5. 0.5 credit in:	0.5
A relevant political economy course from the approved list.	
6. 0.0 credits in:	0.0
COMS 6909 [0.0] Ph.D. Thesis (In the Specialization. Must be successfully defended at an oral examination.)	
Total Credits	5.0

Elective Courses

All doctoral candidates must complete 2.0 additional credits from the list of electives (1.0 for PECO specialization); 0.5 credit may be taken in a relevant discipline outside of the School, particularly those that address central theoretical and/or methodological issues within the student's chosen field of concentration. Students in the Ph.D. program are restricted to one (0.5 credit) directed studies course (COMS 6010 Directed Studies), but these are approved only in exceptional circumstances.

Course descriptions for COMS graduate courses can be found [here](#).

Academic Standing

A standing of B- or better must be obtained in each course counted towards the Ph.D. degree. Students are advised to consult the General Regulations section of the Graduate Calendar for details of regulations governing graduate programs.

PhD Timeline

The PhD program is formally five years in length for full-time students.

This timeline is for full-time students and does not reflect exact dates. Students should set firm dates with their dissertation supervisor and committee. If you have added a specialization, please adapt the course requirements accordingly. For part-time timeline, please see the Graduate Supervisor and [Appendix V](#).

This timeline shows the most direct pathway to completion and does not reflect individual student circumstances including parental leave, leaves of absence, nor extension for extenuating circumstances.

PhD timeline for full-time students

PhD Year 1	
Fall term (S1)	COMS 6000 and two additional COMS courses
Winter term (S2)	COMS 6000 and two additional COMS courses.
April-May	Assemble committee. Complete the PhD Supervisor authorization form (see Appendix II). Comps workshop (late Apr. early May).
Summer term (S3)	Register in Comprehensive Exam: COMS 6101-Field 1 and COMS 6102-Field 2 Select fields in consultation with supervisor/committee. See section below for Comprehensive Exam guidelines. Compile reading lists. See below for Comprehensive Exam details. See Appendix V for part-time roadmap.
PhD Year 2	
Fall term (S4)	COMS 6101-Field 1 and COMS 6102-Field 2 Meet with committee to develop and approve reading lists (Sept.–Oct.).
Winter term (S5)	COMS 6101-Field 1 and COMS 6102-Field 2 Committee meeting to discuss readiness to sit exam (late Feb.–Mar.). If committee agrees student is ready, begin setting questions. (If not, student applies to Grad Supervisor for extension to summer.) Write exam (April).
April-May	COMS 6101-Field 1 and COMS 6102-Field 2 Oral defence of comprehensive exam (May).

Summer term (S6)	<p>If in extension for comprehensive exam, remain registered in COMS 6101-Field 1 and COMS 6102-Field 2</p> <p>If you have successfully defended your comprehensive, then register in COMS 6908: PhD Thesis Proposal</p> <p>Begin work on dissertation proposal. Schedule regular meetings with supervisor.</p>
PhD Year 3	Note: this timeline assumes a 5-year degree program. Individual student pathways may vary.
Fall term (S7)	<p>COMS 6908: PhD Thesis Proposal</p> <p>Continue work on dissertation proposal. Schedule regular meetings with supervisor.</p>
Winter term (S8)	<p>COMS 6908: PhD Thesis Proposal</p> <p>Continue work on proposal; circulate draft to committee and work on revisions.</p>
May	<p>COMS 6908: PhD Thesis Proposal</p> <p>Defend dissertation proposal or extend into Summer term with proposal revisions.</p>
Summer term (S9)	<p>If/when thesis proposal defence completed successfully, register in COMS 6909: PhD Thesis.</p> <p>Begin work on dissertation.</p>
PhD Year 4	Note: this timeline assumes a 5-year degree program. Individual student time to completion may vary.
Fall term (S10)	<p>COMS 6909: PhD Thesis</p> <p>Continue to meet with supervisor and committee members.</p> <p>Work on dissertation.</p>
Winter term (S11)	<p>COMS 6909: PhD Thesis</p> <p>Continue to meet with supervisor and committee members.</p> <p>Work on dissertation.</p>
Summer term (S12)	<p>COMS 6909: PhD Thesis</p> <p>Work on thesis. Continue to have meetings with supervisor and committee members. Review Grad Studies policy on applying for extensions.</p>
PhD Year 5	Note: this timeline assumes a 5-year degree program. Individual student time to completion may vary.
Fall term (S13)	<p>COMS 6909: PhD Thesis</p> <p>Work on dissertation. Finalize dissertation revisions.</p>
Winter term (S14)	<p>COMS 6909: PhD Thesis</p> <p>Six weeks' notice required between receiving thesis copies and the actual defence. Plan accordingly with your supervisor and committee members.</p>

April – Early May	Apply to graduate by April 1st. PhD Thesis Examination
Summer term (S15)	<p>June Convocation for PhD students who have successfully defended by early May.</p> <p>*End of time for program completion. See Graduate Administrator if you require an extension to complete the dissertation.</p> <p>If you defended in Summer, apply to graduate by September 1st.</p>

PhD Comprehensive Examination (for students starting as of Fall 2025)

NOTE: If you started your PhD degree *prior to Fall 2025*, please see [Appendix VI](#), for the guidelines for your Comprehensive Exam II, which differ from the new requirements beginning in 2025.

Comprehensive Exam Requirements (as of Fall 2025)

In addition to their course requirements, PhD students are required to write a two-field comprehensive examination each worth 1.0 credit.

COMS 6101 [0.5]: Comprehensive Exam: Field I

COMS 6102 [0.5]: Comprehensive Exam: Field II

Before taking the comprehensive examination, students must have completed all course work and earned a GPA of 9.0 or higher.

Doctoral students must complete a comprehensive examination covering **two literature fields**, with reading lists curated *in consultation with their supervisory committee*. Each list includes 15–20 books, with five articles or chapters counting as one book. One of the fields (COMS 6101) is selected from a list developed by program faculty and the other field (COMS 6102) may address a subfield closely linked to the student’s dissertation research (see [Appendix IV](#) for the fields list). The exam timeline varies for full-time ([see timeline above](#)) and part-time students (see [Appendix V](#)), but the process and goals remain the same. Part-time students don’t register in Comprehensive Exam: Field I (COMS 6101) and Field II (COMS 6102) until semester 9.

Full-Time Students: By the end of their first year (semester 2), full-time students must assemble a committee and attend a preparatory workshop on the comprehensive process (in-person workshop in late April). In semester 3 (Summer term), students will register in Comprehensive Exam, Field I (COMS 6101) and Comprehensive Exam, Field II (COMS 6102). Students select two fields and compile reading lists with their supervisor’s guidance. The list requires formal approval by the end of October in semester 4. Part-time students

From then until February-March (semester 5), students study both fields while receiving feedback from their supervisor. In February or March, students meet with their committee to assess their readiness to defend the comprehensive. If the student is ready and the committee agrees, the exam is scheduled for March or April (semester 5). If not, students may extend by one term.

When the exam begins, students receive three questions per field set by their supervisor and committee and must choose two per field to answer. Each response is about 10 pages (2500 words), totaling approximately 40 pages (10,000 words) for the whole comprehensive exam (Fields 1 and 2). Students have two weeks to complete the exam, followed by an oral defense within 2–4 weeks.

Each field is evaluated as Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory based on written answers and the defense and the student's committee provides written feedback with the assessment of Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory. If any field is Unsatisfactory, students have six weeks to draft a written response, which may require further engagement with the reading list. A second defense is held promptly.

For semesters 3 through 5, full-time students must register in Comprehensive Exam: Field I (COMS 6101) and Comprehensive Field II (COMS 6102). They must complete both fields by the end of semester 6; failure to do so results in program withdrawal.

Results of the comprehensive exam are sent to the Graduate Supervisor.

The Dissertation Proposal

Students who started the program in or after Fall 2025 should register in COMS 6908: PhD Thesis Proposal after the comprehensive exam has been satisfactorily defended at an oral defence. (*Students who started the program prior to Fall 2025, register directly in COMS 6909 PhD Thesis course code after your comprehensive exam II is successfully defended as this course code includes the proposal and dissertation phases and process.*)

All candidates for the Ph.D. degree must prepare and present a formal dissertation proposal before beginning the substantive work on their dissertation. The proposal is typically 10,000 to 12,000 words in length (40-50 pages). Please review [Appendix III](#) for more detailed proposal guidelines.

Proposal preparation meeting: The student should prepare an outline of their proposal with a bibliography for discussion with and feedback from the full committee (in an in-person meeting constituted for this purpose) prior to submitting the proposal for defence. Don't skip this step!

PhD Dissertation Requirements

Students who have successfully defended their dissertation proposal, should register for COMS 6909 PhD Thesis. The Ph.D. dissertation is typically between 200-300 pages. Guidelines for the preparation of graduate dissertation and information on the procedures for examination are available at [here](#). (For students who began their studies prior to Fall 2025, you register in COMS 6909 after your second comprehensive exam is successfully defended).

Guidelines for the preparation of graduate theses/dissertations such as formatting and title page are available here: [thesis cover page template](#) and [formatting guidelines](#). Your document format should follow recommendations in the APA style manual or an agreed upon style using formatting conventions in MS Word. Please discuss thesis structure and citation style with your supervisor and format accordingly.

PhD Thesis Examination Process

The PhD examination process (including preparation) is outlined carefully and in detail in the Grad Studies' [thesis examination policy](#), which all students and supervisors should be familiar with. Only a summary is provided below.

Pre-examination process: an overview

Thesis Submission

After the appropriate committee reviews, the candidate and the supervisor inform the department of the date they intend to submit the thesis. This **notice shall be given at least two weeks before the dissertation examination copy submission date**, so an examination can be scheduled.

After that notice, the candidate is required to upload the examination copy of the thesis through Carleton Central at least **five weeks before the actual examination date**.

At the time of uploading the dissertation pdf, the candidate must accept the following documents on Carleton Central: Academic Integrity Statement, FIPPA Statement, Carleton University Thesis License Agreement, and Library and Archives Canada (LAC) Non-Exclusive License (optional).

Constitution of the Examination Board

After consultation with the thesis supervisor, the Chair of the Department recommends membership of the thesis examination board to the Vice-Provost (Graduate Studies). The Chair of the Department also evaluates information, including abbreviated CVs regarding the appropriateness of the external examiner suggested by the supervisor. This information will address issues of expertise and check for any conflict of interest.

The examination board (the committee for the defence) is constituted as follows:

- External examiner: from outside Carleton University and who is a recognized authority in the subject of the thesis (details on external examiner selection are [here](#)).
- Internal examiner: a full-time faculty or adjunct from outside the student's home department and who has been at arm's length from the thesis research.
- Thesis supervisor or co-supervisors.
- At least two thesis advisory committee members from the department. Can include cross-appointed and adjunct professors (these are usually the same two members who have been on the committee throughout the student's degree).
- Examination Chair (from outside the department)

It is the responsibility of the Chair of the Department to schedule the examination and to ensure that specific appointments to the examination board are in accordance with the examination policy.

The formal examination process is outlined in section 2.5 of the [thesis examination policy](#). The Chair of the defence governs the proceedings of the examination. Defences are assessed as Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory and with accepted/minor revisions or major modifications, which the supervisor will manage with the student.

A successful defence prompts the final submission process. A thesis deposit cannot be considered complete until it is authorized by your thesis supervisor. It is best to keep in contact with your supervisor to ensure he/she has sufficient time to review and approve your uploaded copy in order to meet the thesis deposit deadlines for registration and Convocation. Once you have graduated, Grad Studies will send your thesis to the National Library and Archives Canada.

Graduate Supervision for MA and PhD students

Finding a topic, finding a supervisor

Whether you decide on the MA research essay or the MA thesis option, or you are a PhD student, you will need a good topic and a suitable supervisor ([check out faculty profiles!](#)). These are a few things to keep in mind on your search:

The Topic

- The topic should be interesting and relevant to you.
- The topic should tackle a problem in the world and the research literature.
- The topic should lend itself to investigation through methods that you can learn and master within the time and resources that you have.
- You should start thinking about your topic early and choose courses that help you develop your topic.
- You should not write term papers that you intend to be thesis chapters.

The Supervisor

- You should approach potential supervisors with your topic ideas, preferably later in the Winter term of the first year.
- Your supervisor can help you to define and shape your topic, proposal, and research plan.
- Your supervisor should be familiar with the literature and/or methodology in your proposed topic area.
- Your supervisor is not your supervisor until they have signed the departmental form of agreement (see Appendix I and Appendix II of this handbook)
- Your supervisor might choose not to “sign on” until you have completed a preliminary proposal that sets out the scope and course of the project.
- You should not switch supervisors unless there has been a breakdown in communication, or you are changing your topic. In this case, please consult the graduate supervisor.
- If you have not found a supervisor for your intended topic towards by the end of the Winter term of the first year, please see the graduate supervisor for further suggestions and/or discuss with your faculty mentor.
- Do not register for the thesis or research essay if you have not yet secured a supervisor.
- Generally, the supervisor and the second reader, or other committee members are full-time faculty members in Communication.

Supervisor – Student relationship

Fundamental to a satisfactory relationship between a supervisor and a student are mutual respect and a high level of professional integrity. Graduate supervisor and grad student responsibilities are outlined in detail in the [responsibilities and expectations policy](#). All full-time tenure track and tenured faculty with a PhD, can supervise students in COMS graduate programs (assistant, associate, and full professors; and adjuncts can co-supervise and/or be committee members).

Responsibilities and Expectations

When a supervisor-student relationship is established for MREs, MA theses, and doctoral dissertations, the parties—students and supervisors—should understand that they assume a clear set of responsibilities and expectations, which are outlined in detail in the Grad Studies policy on student and supervisor [responsibilities and expectations](#). Please review this!

Here are a few highlights from the supervisor responsibilities and expectations policy.

Responsibilities of Supervisors

- To be familiar with and abide by Grad Studies [thesis policies](#) and [requirements](#).
- To provide constructive feedback to work submitted by the student in a timely manner. Where this feedback cannot be provided within one month this delay must be handled in full consultation with the student.
- To maintain regular communication and consultation with the student and to convene meetings of the thesis/dissertation advisory committee.
- To provide notification of lengthy absences, including sabbaticals, and expectations for support and feedback.
- To support reference letters for scholarship, award, and fellowship proposals and academic job applications.
- To discuss and agree on a reasonable time to completion of the research and thesis in line with Grad Studies policies.
- To assist the student in identifying a suitable research topic.
- To indicate clearly when a draft thesis is acceptable for examination or, if it is not, what the revision process requires. See the [responsibilities and expectations](#) policy on this point.

Responsibilities of Students

- To choose, with the supervisor's help, a feasible research topic.
- To work systematically and within agreed deadlines, as far as possible, in order to meet the program deadlines specified by both the department and Graduate Studies.
- To familiarize themselves with the unit and Graduate Studies [policies](#) regarding the elements, pathway, and completion of their degree.
- To make themselves available for meetings with their supervisor during regular business hours.
- To be well prepared for meetings with the supervisor.
- To participate in the professional development opportunities provided by their unit and Graduate Studies.
- To agree with the supervisor on a reasonable schedule for the completion of each portion of the research and thesis.
- To submit to the supervisor all research materials, as requested, and, at the agreed times, drafts of parts of the thesis for comment.
- To give serious attention to the advice and direction of the supervisor.
- To realize that the supervisor has duties and commitments that may delay access at short notice or slow down the return of a draft.
- To acknowledge direct assistance of material drawn from other scholars and researchers.
- To produce a thesis which meets the specifications and standards of Graduate Studies and the academic unit.

- To submit the thesis to the judgment of the academic unit via the examination procedures specified and to abide by the judgment of the examiners, subject to any appeal on grounds of procedural irregularities.
- To respect copyright regulations when reproducing external material in the thesis.
- To maintain regular communication with the supervisor.

Please see Grad Studies [responsibilities and expectations](#) policy for more information.

Student Registration Policies

Continuous Registration in Thesis, Dissertation, or Research Essay

Any student (full-time or part-time), after initial registration in a thesis or research essay, must maintain this registration in all successive terms (including the term in which the student is examined) until their thesis or research essay is completed. Completion means submission of a final grade to Grad Studies after modifications/revisions. Students should note that faculty approval to register in the thesis or research essay is given on the understanding that the student will be in regular contact with their supervisor, and that the thesis research will be actively pursued in each term of registration.

Summer Registration

During the summer term, MA students in their first year can choose not to register. However, if a student does not register any funding allotted to the summer term will be cancelled; and it is not carried forward. Once the student registers (full-time) again in the Fall, any subsequent funding such as a priority TA appointment, will restart. Please note, non-registration is not a pause button – the timeline to completion carries on regardless of registration status, so the summer term will still count towards a student's overall time limit.

Loss of Status

Any student who remains unregistered in their degree program for three terms (twelve months) will lose their graduate status.

Full- and Part-time Student Status

Full- or part-time status is established at the time of admission to a program. Graduate students admitted and registered as full-time students are expected to continue in and complete their program as full-time students and will be assessed full-time fees for the duration of their program. Graduate students admitted and registered as part-time students will be required to continue and complete their program as part-time students and will be assessed part-time fees for the duration of their program. A part-time graduate student will not register in more than 1.25 credits per term, including audit courses. TA and RA positions are not available to part-time students.

Change of Status from Full-Time to Part-Time

Students who have valid reasons and/or extenuating circumstances for changing status from full- to part-time prior to registration for a term should first consult with their supervisor and graduate supervisor and then may apply to Grad Studies for permission by:

- Contacting the Graduate Supervisor stating the reason(s) for seeking exemption from the full-time registration requirements in Section 7.9 of the Graduate Calendar, and by completing the [Academic Change Form](#) in support of their request.

- A status change will be granted only in **exceptional cases** (e.g., for medical reasons, full-time employment when supported by a letter from the student's employer, or other extenuating circumstances).

Leave of Absence (exemption from registration)

It is important that students discuss this option with their supervisor first and the Graduate Supervisor. Ultimately, it is Grad Studies who will determine whether an exemption from registration as a leave of absence will be granted. The 'Reason for this request' section the student fills in on the [Registration Change](#) form may include options such as:

- Navigating medical-related issues
- Navigating mental health issues
- Death of a loved one
- Personal/family matters
- Pregnancy/parental leave
- Increased caregiving responsibilities
- Temporary increase in work-related responsibilities

When a leave of absence (LOA) for a term or terms has been approved by Grad Studies, this period will be exempt from the overall time limit allowed for completion of the program. Students should also apply for a Leave from Duties so that any TAs they hold will be deferred until they are back. If the Leave is approved, any funding is also deferred. Students who are not registered should not be on campus for the term and should not use any University facilities (that is, library, laboratories, computer centre, etc.), or receive any supervision, including supervision through correspondence.

Parental Leave: Students applying for parental leave will not be registered, nor will they be required to pay fees for this period. They will not be eligible to receive awards administered by Carleton University during the leave. In the case of other awards, the regulations of the particular granting agency will apply. The time limit for completion of the program will be extended by the duration of the leave taken. Please contact the Graduate Administrator for more information.

Extension

Students who have exceeded the regular program length for their degree, may apply for an extension from Grad Studies so that they can complete their degree. Grad Studies requires students to complete this extension [form](#).

For **MA students**, the extension form must be signed by your supervisor and the graduate supervisor, and you must detail your reasons for the extension and a clear timeline to completion.

For **PhD students**, you must have approval from your supervisor and committee members in writing sent by email to the graduate supervisor. To apply for an extension in the PhD program students must explain in writing on the form why the extension is necessary and append a timeline to completion approved by your committee and supervisor. Please be in touch with your dissertation supervisor and the graduate supervisor to start this process if required.

Appendix I

To be completed and filed with Graduate Administrator. The following committee has agreed to advise:

Student name - print

Student number

Student Signature

on their work in the MA Program of Communication of the School of Journalism and Communication at Carleton University subject to the regulations of Grad Studies and the School. The student having enrolled in, and been admitted to the Program, signifies in the selection and acceptance of the committee members, their willingness to accept the committee's advice and voluntarily carry out the Program of study and the examination which they have jointly formulated.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Supervisor name

Signature

Date

Committee member name

Signature

Date

Approval by Graduate Supervisor

Signature

Date

MA COMMITTEE CHANGES, if required.

Committee member **withdrawing from participation** in the above named student's Advisory committee:

Committee member withdrawing

Signature

Date

Committee member joining the committee to work with the above named Ph.D. student as a member of the Advisory committee

Committee member joining

Signature

Date

The Supervisor of the committee has been informed and consented to this change.

Approved by Graduate Supervisor

Signature

Date

Appendix II

Ph.D. Dissertation Advisory Committee Form

To be completed and filed with the Graduate Administrator. The following committee has agreed to advise:

Student name

Student number

Student Signature _____

on their work in the Ph.D. Communication program at the School of Journalism and Communication of Carleton University subject to the regulations of the Grad Studies and the Department. The student having enrolled in, and been admitted to the Program, signifies in the selection and acceptance of the committee members, their willingness to accept the committee's advice and voluntarily carry out the program of study and the examination which they have jointly formulated.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Supervisor name

Signature

Date

Committee member name

Signature

Date

Committee member name

Signature

Date _____

Approved by Graduate Supervisor

Signature

Date

PhD COMMITTEE CHANGES, if required.

Committee member **withdrawing from participation** in the above named student's Advisory committee:

Committee member withdrawing

Signature

Date

Committee member joining the committee to work with the above named Ph.D. student as a member of the Advisory committee

Committee member joining

Signature

Date _____

The Supervisor of the committee has been informed and consented to this change.

Approved by Graduate Supervisor

Signature

Date _____

Appendix III: MA and PhD Thesis guidelines

For your MA or PhD thesis (or dissertation as it is often called for a PhD), you will need to work closely with your supervisor and committee. How your documents are set up, structured, and formatted should be on the advice of your supervisor and require the application of a consistent style, such as APA, and you will need good working knowledge of MS Word to build your proposal and thesis using a style sheet for consistency.² Carleton University does not provide a thesis document template because Word Styles functionality can help you to produce a structured document and TOC. Students must be able to use Word or develop this capability during their degree.

MA Thesis Proposal Guidelines

All MA students must write a thesis proposal. Your thesis proposal should have a working title and should be approximately 3500-4000 words long. Its main purpose is to tell the committee what you are going to do in your thesis and how you are going to do it. It is not an essay.

After reading the proposal, the committee should have a clear understanding of what the boundaries of your project are and how you are going to complete it. They should understand its theoretical, empirical and methodological contributions and be convinced of its intellectual and social relevance. It should include the following elements:

- Specify your thesis statement or working argument. Focus on its logic and use theorized language to describe it. It should be succinct and clearly stated in one sentence. It answers the question: “What is my thesis arguing?” This should also be reflected in your title. Some people have a thesis question; others prefer to write it as a statement.
- Provide a literature review covering some of the scholarship that relates to your topic and enables you to locate your research within it. Ask yourself: “What have others in my field(s) done and what area will my research address?” It is often helpful to generate a set of research questions out of the literature review.
- Identify and define the key theoretical concepts through which you will be conceptualizing your analysis in abstract terms, anticipating how these concepts are contested. The theoretical framework will answer the question: “What concepts will I use to analyze the phenomenon at the heart of my project?”
- Identify your research methodology or process. This answers the “how” questions of your project. How will you conduct this research? You should think about the object of analysis, how you will gather information about it or from it, and how you will make sense of it.
- Provide a timetable for your research and thesis writing. Include dates for draft and chapter submissions to committee members and allow 3-4 weeks for return of work from your committee and revisions. Be realistic.
- Include a bibliography of sources you cite in the proposal and other relevant writings in the area.
- Provide an ethics statement if you are working with human subjects. See [CUREB-A](#).

MA Thesis guidelines

For MA students, thesis guidelines should be discussed with your supervisor and committee. See thesis formatting guidelines here: <https://gradstudents.carleton.ca/resources-page/thesis-requirements/formatting-guidelines/>

² Google Docs does not have the required styles and features for creating structured thesis document. Please use Word.

MA Thesis or Dissertation Cover page

This cover page file allows you to fill in your details and then generate the title page for your thesis/dissertation: <https://gradstudents.carleton.ca/wp-content/uploads/Thesis-Title-Page-template-2.pdf>

Thesis non-exclusive license <https://gradstudents.carleton.ca/wp-content/uploads/LAC-license-2025.pdf>
(this is for when your thesis is ready for defence and uploaded to the thesis portal)

Helpful APA style guide resource: [OWL Purdue](#)

PhD dissertation proposal guidelines

The guidelines are relevant to all PhD students regardless of when you entered the program.

The “Dissertation Proposal” (“proposal”) is a road map in which the PhD candidate outlines the steps that will be taken during the execution of their dissertation research. The goal is to provide the candidate an opportunity to articulate and receive feedback on the plan of research prior to conducting any fieldwork, collecting data, or otherwise initiating their project. In it, the candidate locates the project with respect to the major theoretical traditions informing their work and outlines the major substantive research findings found within scholarship relevant to their proposal. The goal is to situate the dissertation with respect to existing scholarship and to avoid reproducing work previously done in the area. The proposal includes: (1) submission of a written proposal; and (2) an oral evaluation meeting (defence).

Eligibility: The dissertation proposal is begun after students have successfully completed their comprehensive exam.

Timeline: Normally it takes six to nine months to complete the proposal. Full-time students should normally present their proposal before the end of their third year. Part-time students should normally present their proposal during their fifth year in the program and must do so by the end of the fall term of their sixth year at the latest.

Committee: The committee for the dissertation proposal is typically comprised of three members: a supervisor and two additional faculty in the unit. Members of the committee are determined by the candidate in consultation with the supervisor. The proposal committee can be a continuation of, but may be different from, the comprehensive exam committee. Except in extremely rare circumstances, the proposal committee will be the candidate’s PhD thesis committee.

Written proposal

The doctoral proposal is developed by the candidate in consultation with the committee. At an early stage of writing the proposal, the candidate should schedule an in-person preparation meeting with the committee to discuss an outline (with a bibliography) or an early draft of the proposal.

The proposal is typically 10,000 – 12,000 words (40-50 pages) (not including references) and should include: a concise literature review; a clear explanation of the main question or problem(s) to be addressed and how it relates to research in the field; a discussion of theoretical approach(es) from which question(s) or problem(s) will be explored; a description of the methodology and main source

materials to be used in the research; and a proposed timeframe for completion. If a [research ethics](#) clearance is required, this should be addressed as well.

Oral evaluation meeting (defence): Upon submission of the written proposal and its approval by all members of the committee, the candidate and the supervisor are responsible for scheduling a meeting. The meeting typically includes: (1) an oral presentation (10-15 minutes) synthesizing the main points of the proposal; (2) two rounds of questioning (90-100 minutes); and (3) a closing statement by the student (optional). See the PhD timeline for the schedule.

Assessment: Both written and oral components must meet the standard acceptable to the committee. The assessment is sent to the graduate supervisor.

After successfully completing the proposal, students who began their program in Fall 2025 or after, should register in COMS 6909 Ph.D. Thesis.

PhD Dissertation guidelines

For PhD students, dissertation guidelines should be discussed with your supervisor and committee. The university does have existing formatting requirements and recommendations.

See thesis/dissertation formatting guidelines here: <https://gradstudents.carleton.ca/resources-page/thesis-requirements/formatting-guidelines/>

Thesis or dissertation cover page

This cover page file allows you to fill in your details and then generate the title page for your thesis/dissertation: <https://gradstudents.carleton.ca/wp-content/uploads/Thesis-Title-Page-template-2.pdf>

Thesis non-exclusive license <https://gradstudents.carleton.ca/wp-content/uploads/LAC-license-2025.pdf>

Appendix IV: Comprehensive Exam Fields list

NOTE: This process is for students entering the PhD program in Fall 2025 or after.

This list reflects current and enduring areas of focus in the field, faculty expertise, and specialized research themes. It also helps structure the comprehensive exam process, guiding students and supervisory committees in connecting the two required field papers. One of the field exams, **COMS 6101: Field 1, must be selected from this list**. See description of comprehensive exam in outlined in a [previous section](#) of this document. Students and committees may also draw on this list for the Field 2 exam if it is a helpful structure, but it is not mandatory.

The program is strongly committed to intersectional studies that engage thematic areas including critical race theory, feminist and gender theory, critical disability studies, Indigenous studies, and decoloniality each of which may cut across other subfields. Terms such as political communication, cultural studies, sociology of culture, communication policy, critical data, critical computation and algorithms/AI, and technology studies, and others are implicitly included within the categories below. The goal was to create a focused yet flexible framework rather than adhere to specific labels and provide a good sense of the field's boundaries as reflected in our program.

The following key phrases capture core concerns and evolving themes within the field and specialized interests of our faculty:

1. Communication and media and social critique
2. Communication and media theory and method
3. Communication, Technology and Society
4. Communication and media history
5. Audience and reception studies
6. Political economy of communication
7. Platform and infrastructure studies
8. Global and regional communication and media studies
9. Identity, power, and resistance
10. Environment, health, and risk communication

Appendix V: Part-time PhD comprehensive exam schedule

This applies to PhD students entering the program in 2025 or after and who entered the program registered as part-time students.

Proposed Comprehensive Exam Timeline, Part-Time Students

Semester	Milestones
8	Year 3/semester 8 Assemble committee. Comps workshop (Apr.–May).
9	Register in Comprehensive Exam: Field I (COMS 6101) and Field II (COMS 6102) Select fields in consultation with supervisor/committee. Compile reading lists.
10	Comprehensive Exam: Field I (COMS 6101) and Field II (COMS 6102) Meet with committee to approve reading lists (Sept.–Oct.).
11	Year 4/semester 11 Comprehensive Exam: Field I (COMS 6101) and Field II (COMS 6102) Committee meeting to discuss readiness to sit exam (Feb.–Mar.). If committee agrees student is ready, begin setting questions. If not, student applies to Grad Supervisor for extension to summer. Sit exam (Mar.–Apr.). Defend answers (Apr.–May). Register in Thesis proposal, COMS 6908.

Please note:

Part-time students should normally present their proposal during their fifth year in the program and must do so by the end of the fall term of their sixth year at the latest. Once they successfully defend the proposal, students can register in COMS 6909 PhD Thesis.

Students who were accepted into the PhD program on a part-time basis must complete their degree by the end of their 9th year.

Appendix VI: Information for PhD students in program prior to Fall 2025

PhD course requirements pre-2025 admissions

1. COMS 6000 Doctoral Seminar in Communication Studies (1.0 credit)
2. Two [2.0] additional credits from the list of optional courses below:
COMS 5102, 5200, 5202, 5203, 5205, 5206, 5207, 5208, 5209, 5212, 5214, 5218, 5219, 5220, 5221, 5222, 5223, 5224, 5225, 5509, 5605, 6001, 6005, 6006, 6007, 6010
JOUR 5401
Note: Up to 0.5 credit may be taken in a relevant discipline outside of the School, with permission of the Graduate Supervisor; students in the Ph.D. program are restricted to one (0.5 credit) directed studies course (COMS 6010).
3. 2.0 credits in:
COMS 6900 [1.0] Comprehensive Examination I
COMS 6901 [1.0] Comprehensive Examination II
4. COMS 6909 [0.0] PhD Thesis

Once COMS 6901 is completed, students who entered the program prior to 2025, will register directly in COMS 6909 PhD Thesis and begin work on your proposal and then dissertation. This pathway is slightly modified for newer students, but the credits, deliverables and requirements remain the same for all.

Second comprehensive (for PhD students admitted before 2025)

COMS 6901: The Second Comprehensive Examination

The “Second Comprehensive Examination” (“second comp”) requires students to conduct a “literature review” on an identifiable tradition, sub-field, problem or thematic in the field of communication. It is intended to demonstrate an ability to organize, synthesize and critique a body of scholarship relevant to one’s expertise, and to prepare students to carry out independent research. In most circumstances, the second comp would contribute to the theoretical framework and/or literature review of the dissertation and help define the student’s area of expertise. The second comp examination includes: (1) submission of a written comprehensive paper; and (2) an oral examination.

Eligibility: For students who joined the program prior to 2025, to be eligible for COMS 6901 the second comprehensive examination candidates must have completed COMS 6000 (Doctoral Seminar in Communication Studies) and COMS 6900 (First Comprehensive Exam).

Timeline: Normally it takes one full year to complete the second comp. Students typically start working on the proposal in the Summer term of Year 1, for their committee’s approval in the beginning of the Fall term of Year 2. This will allow students to submit the written paper and defend it at the oral examination in the Winter term of Year 2.

Committee: The committee for the second comp is comprised of three members: a supervisor and, typically, two additional faculty in the department. The committee members are determined by the

student in consultation with the supervisor. The second comp committee can continue to be, but may be different from, the committee established for the dissertation work.

Written paper: The second comp paper is developed by the student in consultation with the supervisor and committee. It requires a proposal (approximately 500-1000 words) that outlines the goals, rationale, and timeline for completion of the comp, and a complete list of the books, articles and materials consulted for the exam (including 25 books or a combination of books and articles where five (5) articles constitute one book). It is highly encouraged that students include a detailed timeline that allows adequate time for supervisor and committee feedback on drafts, if necessary, and the final submission. Upon the approval of the proposal, the student develops the paper, primarily in consultation with the supervisor. The length should be 10,000-12,000 words (i.e. 30-40 pages), not including references.

Oral examination: Upon submission of the written paper and the approval by all members of the committee, the student and supervisor are responsible for scheduling the exam. The exam may be held during any time of the year (Fall / Winter /Summer). An oral examination typically includes: (1) an oral presentation (10 minutes) synthesizing the main points of the paper; (2) two rounds of questioning (approx. 90 minutes); and (3) a brief closing statement by the student (optional).

Exam Grading: The exam is graded satisfactory/unsatisfactory on both written and oral components by the student's committee.

Rationale: The second comp ensures that PhD students have: (1) an appropriate foundation and the depth and breadth of knowledge in their area of expertise; (2) the capacity to engage in scholarly communication both oral and written; and (3) appropriate knowledge to design course materials for teaching in their area of expertise.