

# MAC Handbook

**Created by Lisa M. Parcell, PhD  
Graduate Coordinator  
Elliott School of Communication**

## Table of Contents

<b><i>Curriculum</i></b>	<b>4</b>
Required Core Courses	4
Electives	4
Courses outside of Elliott	5
Incompletes	5
How to sign up for thesis or project hours	5
How to sign up for a class with unmet prerequisites	6
Summer classes	6
If I have a complaint about a class, who can I talk to?	6
<b><i>Graduate School Deadlines</i></b>	<b>7</b>
<b><i>Graduate School Forms</i></b>	<b>7</b>
Submitting Grad School Forms	7
Exception Form	7
Plan of Study	8
Application for Degree and Exit Survey	9
GPA	9
<b><i>Graduate Teaching Assistants</i></b>	<b>9</b>
GTA Training	10
GTA Health Insurance	10
GTA COMM 111 Fund	10
<b><i>Money Stuff</i></b>	<b>10</b>
Financial Aid	11
Student Fees and Other Costs	11
Health Insurance	11
<b><i>Graduate Professional Project Guidelines</i></b>	<b>11</b>
Overview	11
Committee	11
Credit Hours	11
Graduate project guidelines – proposal components	12
Graduate project guidelines – written components	13

Graduate project guidelines – oral components	14
<b><i>Thesis</i></b>	<b>15</b>
Overview	15
Committee	15
How to find an external thesis committee member	15
Credit Hours	16
Hitting a Wall	16
Thesis guidelines – proposal components	16
Introduction	17
Literature Review	17
Research Question	18
Research Design and Method	18
ESC COMM 111 students as subjects	18
Proposal Defense	18
Institutional Review Board (IRB)	19
Final Thesis Defense	20
<b><i>Comprehensive Exams</i></b>	<b>21</b>
Overview	21
Selecting a Committee	21
The exam itself	21
<b><i>Academic Honesty</i></b>	<b>22</b>

## Curriculum

The Masters of Arts in Communication (MAC) program requires a total of 36 credit hours. 15 of those are required core courses and the other 21 hours are electives.

### Required Core Courses

COMM 801 Introduction to Communication Research (3 hours)

COMM 803 Empirical/Quantitative Methodologies in Communication Research (3 hours)

COMM 812 Contemporary Theories in Communication (3 hours)

Qualitative Methods: select **two** of the 3-credit 800-level qualitative methods courses offered by the department. Ask the graduate coordinator which classes qualify. (6 hours)

### Electives

In addition to the required courses, students, with the advice and consent of their faculty adviser and the graduate coordinator, must select courses to complete the plan of study. The plan of study will be individually designed to accommodate a student's background, interests, and needs and must include a minimum of 60 percent of their graduate hours at the 700-899 level.

Students will also choose a thesis, project, **or** comps option to complete their program.

**Thesis:** Students must take 6 hours of thesis credit evenly divided between two consecutive semesters. Thesis hours are considered part of your 21 elective hours. (See the Thesis section on pages 15-20 for more details.)

**Project:** Students must take 6 hours of project credit evenly divided between two consecutive semesters. Project hours are considered part of your 21 elective hours. (See the Project section on pages 11-14 for more details.)

**Comps:** Students must take comprehensive exams in their last year of the program. Students do not enroll in credit hours for comprehensive exams. (See the Comprehensive Exams section on page 21 for more details.)

**Always consult with your advisor about what electives to sign up for.** Your advisor can suggest classes that might be of interest to you and can help you avoid classes that will not count toward your degree.

Only classes at the 500-level or above will count toward your degree. If a class is cross-listed, in other words, offered as a 500-level or a 600-level *and* an 800-level, always sign up for the 800-level.

You cannot take a class twice. So if, for example, you took COMM 535 as an undergraduate, you cannot take it again as a graduate student even if you know the content or instructor has changed.

### Courses outside of Elliott

You can take up to two classes outside of our department and have them count toward your degree. They must be at the 500-level or higher. Always get approval from your advisor and the graduate coordinator before enrolling. You may need to work with the instructor of the class and their admin to get electronic permission to enroll. No one in the Elliott School can enroll you or waive prerequisites for classes outside of our department.

### Incompletes

Sometimes life hits hard and you are unable to finish the work for a class. Illness, family crises, and other events often occur at the most inopportune time. If you find yourself underwater, be proactive first. Please do not wait until the end of the semester when it's an emergency. Contact your instructors, explain what is happening in your life, and ask if you can have some extensions on work. Most professors are willing to work with you. If you are taking multiple classes, triage a bit. Figure out what classes you can keep up with and do so.

If you decide that an Incomplete is your best option, you will need to first ask if that's possible from your instructor. It is up to each individual instructor whether they are willing to work with you beyond the time period of the class to complete work. If the instructor is willing, clearly establish in writing (email is fine) what work is missing and create deadlines for turning it in. It's strongly suggested that you finish the missing work before the next semester starts, if at all possible. So if you take an Incomplete in the Fall, try to finish the work before the Spring semester begins. If you take an Incomplete in the Spring, finish the work over the summer. Trying to work on last semester's classes while taking new classes is difficult, at best. This will need to be a negotiation with the instructor to make sure that the timing of work being turned in and graded fits with both the instructor's and your schedule.

The graduate school automatically changes any Incompletes to an F after one year. It's up to you, the student, to keep up with deadlines and finishing the class work. Neither the graduate school nor the individual instructor sends reminders to help keep you on track.

### How to sign up for thesis or project hours

Thesis hours must be evenly split between two consecutive semesters. This means that students enroll in COMM 875 in one semester and then COMM 876 in the next semester. This allows you to complete the thesis proposal in COMM 875 and finish the thesis in COMM 876. You must **complete and defend** the thesis proposal in COMM 875 **BEFORE** enrolling in COMM 876.

To enroll for thesis hours, email your advisor AND copy the graduate coordinator to ask for permission to enroll in either 875 or 876. Include your WSU ID in the email. The advisor will then forward that email to whoever is able to give you electronic permission to enroll. After your ID has been added to the class, you should be able to enroll.

### How to sign up for a class with unmet prerequisites

If you try to sign up for a class and you get an error message saying you don't have the pre-reqs to enroll, you will need to email the instructor of the class AND copy the graduate coordinator to ask for permission to enroll. Include your WSU ID in the email. Also include a bit about why you want to take the class, what background you might have that would make you successful without the pre-reqs, and your year in graduate school. If the instructor agrees, they will forward your email to whoever is able to give you electronic permission to enroll. After your ID has been added to the class, you should be able to enroll.

### Summer classes

In order to understand what classes are offered in the summer, it helps to understand how the university budget works. There are essentially two different budgets for offering classes. The first is the traditional Fall/Spring budget. The vast majority of faculty are paid on this budget and, as such, are only paid 9 months out of the year. (Yes, just like your first grade teacher). Faculty teaching loads (the number of classes each faculty member teaches a year) are set based on their university obligations at the time. This means that the university has a pretty good idea of how many classes it can offer in the Fall and Spring based on the number of faculty at the university at the time.

The summer schedule, however, is very different. Each college (in our case the Fairmount College of Arts and Sciences) is given a summer budget in which to hire instructors to teach classes. In recent years, enrollment is closely tied to those dollars, so LAS encourages departments to offer classes that enroll high numbers of students to get the most out of the summer budget. Unfortunately, 800-level graduate classes are generally lower-enrolled and are increasingly less likely to be offered. We do typically offer at least one 500- or 600-level class in the summer that could enroll both undergraduate and graduate students.

Because of the way the university budgets work it is not a good idea to "count on" taking summer classes. Whenever we can, we will try to offer something for graduate students, but we just cannot guarantee that will happen with any regularity.

As mentioned previously, most faculty are only paid during the Fall and Spring semesters. While some faculty are available and willing to work on graduate projects/thesis/comps, etc. over the summer, please recognize that this is their time off. Faculty do not receive paid vacation time (only sick leave) so asking faculty to work in the summer is essentially asking them to work during their unpaid vacation.

### If I have a complaint about a class, who can I talk to?

You should always start with the instructor of the course. Please be clear and concise about what the problem is and, if possible, offer reasonable solutions to help fix it. Often issues are simply a misunderstanding and can be straightened out with an email or a short meeting. If you have tried repeatedly to work out a problem with an instructor and not had any luck, your next step is to contact Dr. Jeffrey Jarman, Director of the Elliott School. The first thing he's going to

ask you is to explain all the steps you have taken to work it out with the instructor first, so make sure you have made an honest effort. If he cannot help you resolve the issue, you can move up the chain of command to the dean's office, although that is extremely rare.

## Graduate School Deadlines

The graduate school has various deadlines throughout the year that you really do need to pay attention to. They have them posted on their website here

<https://www.wichita.edu/academics/gradschool/DegreeCompletion/Deadlines.php>

and regularly send out email reminders. These dates include deadlines for submitting the Application for Degree, the Request to Schedule an Oral Defense (only for thesis, not project or comps), the last day you can defend a thesis (again, only for thesis, not project or comps), and a final submission date for all other graduation-related materials.

## Graduate School Forms

### Submitting Grad School Forms

There isn't one email to use when submitting graduate school forms. Different graduate school staff members are responsible for different duties. Instead you will have to look up who in the graduate school is in charge of that form or activity and email it directly to them. This graduate school website is kept up to date on who is in charge of what. Before emailing anything to the graduate school, check to see who, specifically, it should go to here:

<https://www.wichita.edu/academics/gradschool/GraduateSchool/Office/OurStaff.php>

### Exception Form

There are many things that are against graduate school rules but can still be done with permission. This can include working another part-time job on campus in addition to your regular Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) position, teaching an extra class as a GTA, dropping or adding a class of your own late in the semester, taking fewer than 9 hours your last semester as a GTA, etc. In order to ask for permission to do any of these, you need to fill out an Exception Form. <https://www.wichita.edu/academics/gradschool/Forms/ExceptionForm.php>

Make sure you fill out the entire top half. Give a 2-3 sentence explanation about why you are asking for the exception in the blank space provided. Then sign it and give it to your advisor and graduate coordinator for signature. Once everyone has signed, it will need to be sent to the graduate school. Please copy your advisor and the graduate coordinator when you submit the form to the graduate school.

### Plan of Study

The graduate school would like us to submit Plans of Study for all students after their first semester. However, with 21 hours of electives to take, it's virtually impossible to guess what elective classes you will take (or even what we will offer) in future semesters. Instead, you

should fill out your plan of study as soon as the course schedule comes out for the semester in which you want to graduate. In other words, if you plan to graduate in the Spring semester, as soon as the course schedule comes out in October for the Spring semester, figure out what you want to take in the spring to complete your degree and then fill out the Plan of Study form.

The Plan of Study form is on the graduate school website here:

[https://www.wichita.edu/academics/graduate\\_school/documents/PlanOfStudy-Masters\\_Specialist.pdf](https://www.wichita.edu/academics/graduate_school/documents/PlanOfStudy-Masters_Specialist.pdf)

On the front page, fill out the following: Your name, WSU ID, email and phone number at the top. Do NOT fill out anything in the box about language, PSIT, or terminal activities. Leave this section blank. In the committee section at the bottom, ONLY fill it out if you are doing a thesis. If you are doing a project or comps, leave it blank.

On the second page, include the course #, course title, number of hours, grade (leave blank if grade not on transcript yet), and Semester/year. If you have been given permission by your advisor and the graduate coordinator to transfer in credits, identify those here as well. The total at the bottom of this page should be 36 hours. If your hours listed above are less than 36, you need to take more classes. If your hours listed above are more than 36, contact the graduate coordinator to figure out what to leave off this Plan of Study.

Finally, use Adobe Acrobat Pro (not Preview or Adobe Reader) to electronically sign and date the form on the first line at the bottom. Then email it to your advisor for signature. Once your advisor and the graduate coordinator have signed and dated the form, it should be sent to the graduate school.

Usually the graduate coordinator sends in the form if they are the last person from the ESC to sign. However, if you send in the form to the graduate school, please make sure to copy your advisor and the graduate coordinator.

Wait a few days and then check your electronic records to see if the plan of study has appeared. If you don't see it or have trouble accessing it, contact the graduate school for help. This isn't something we can fix or gain access to from our end.

The Plan of Study will need to be completed and turned in before you can fill out the Application for Degree.

### [Application for Degree and Exit Survey](#)

In the first month of your last semester you will need to apply to graduate, complete an exit survey, and pay a graduation filing fee. This is, again, done through the graduate school. This is the step that will make sure that you have all the curriculum requirements to complete your degree. This is NOT part of the process to sign up for the graduation ceremony itself. That is done separately. Watch your email for instructions from the university (not the ESC) on how to sign up for the graduation ceremony.

This website includes the information for the Application for Degree, the Exit Survey, and the graduation filing fee.

<https://www.wichita.edu/academics/gradschool/DegreeCompletion/ApplicationforDegree.php>

If you postpone graduation, you will need a new Application for Degree and filing fee before the published deadline for that semester. The Exit Survey only needs to be completed once.

### GPA

You must have at least a cumulative graduate 3.0 GPA for all WSU courses on the Plan of Study and for all WSU graduate work. Courses that receive a C- or below cannot be included on your Plan of Study.

## Graduate Teaching Assistants

We regularly have 12 Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) at any one time. The number we hire each year depends on the number that graduated the year before. GTA positions are chosen in the Spring semester, typically in March or April. All positions begin in the Fall semester.

GTA positions are part-time, temporary work that averages 20 hours a week. In exchange, GTAs receive a small stipend and their tuition is paid by the university. Most semesters GTAs will teach two sections of COMM 111 Public Speaking, although occasionally GTAs will be tasked with doing different work for the department. In addition, GTAs attend a bi-weekly staff meeting and hold office hours in the Center for Excellence in Oral Communication.

Teaching assignments are made after GTAs have registered for their own classes to avoid conflicts. While we may be able to work around other outside commitments, that cannot be promised. We recognize that students often have other jobs to supplement their income, however a GTA position is a job as well and there may be times when the two conflict. Please consider carefully other job commitments before applying to be a GTA.

### GTA Training

Before beginning a GTA position, all selected GTAs must take COMM 750C in the pre-session before Fall semester. This class teaches GTAs how to teach the COMM 111 Public Speaking class, walking through each section of the class and giving tips on grading and other pedagogy. In addition it is an excellent way to get to know the other GTAs. Most GTAs become a collaborative group sharing class activities, advice, and other teaching tips. These friendships often begin in this class and last for decades.

In addition to the 750C class, the Graduate School also has a required GTA orientation/training that ESC GTAs must attend. The orientation usually falls during one of the class days of 750C and students will be released for the orientation/training. The Graduate School will email GTAs more information in the weeks before. The Graduate School and the university offers other trainings throughout the year. Some are mandatory for all teaching instructors and some are not. Please take any mandatory training seriously or you may be released from your GTA position. Again, GTAs will receive more information on those as they come up.

### GTA Health Insurance

The graduate school offers optional discounted health insurance for GTAs in the Fall and Spring semesters. You do need to register before EVERY semester that you want coverage. There is more information here: [www.wichita.edu/gahealth](http://www.wichita.edu/gahealth)

For questions about costs, deadlines, the coverage itself, etc., that aren't answered on the website above, contact the graduate school. Please note that there is NO health insurance for over the summer even if you are teaching a class or two for the department.

### GTA COMM 111 Fund

Fees collected from the sale of the COMM111 handbook are reserved for research and training opportunities for GTAs. These funds can be used for travel to conferences, research materials, research participants, etc. If you are interested in applying for this funding, please contact the graduate coordinator.

## Money Stuff

As a general rule of thumb, ESC faculty know little to nothing about fees, insurance, financial aid, billing, and anything related to money. Faculty are great at giving advice about curriculum, research, teaching tips, etc. But if you have a question related to any form of financial information, you are better off going directly to the department that handles it.

### Financial Aid

None of the ESC faculty are at all qualified to give advice on financial aid. If you have questions, please contact them directly. [https://www.wichita.edu/administration/financial\\_aid/](https://www.wichita.edu/administration/financial_aid/)

### Student Fees and Other Costs

A GTA position will pay for tuition, but not student fees. Questions about student fees should be directed to the Graduate School.

### Health Insurance

The Graduate School website here gives the fee structure for the optional health insurance: [www.wichita.edu/gahealth](http://www.wichita.edu/gahealth) If you have specific questions, please contact the Graduate School directly.

# Graduate Professional Project Guidelines

## Overview

As a culminating experience toward completion of a MA in Communication degree, a graduate professional project is a combination of academic and applied processes. Each graduate professional project includes the following:

- Students select a three-person committee (a chair and additional member from the ESC graduate faculty and an outside representative from a professional organization) to guide the project.
- Students must enroll for 3 or 6 credits of graduate project (COMM 8703).
- Each project must begin with a project proposal and end with an academic report and a professional project, all delivered in written form and defended orally.

## Committee

The student will work with an academic advisor (who serves as the chair for the student's committee) to develop a graduate project plan. This advisor must be a member of the ESC graduate faculty. In addition, the committee will include a second ESC graduate faculty member and one external professional member representing a professional organization. This committee will help guide the student through the proposal and final report/defense process. All final decisions about a graduate project will be made in collaboration with the student's academic advisor.

## Credit Hours

For a 6-hour project, the project course credits must be spread over two consecutive semesters. The proposal is completed and defended in the first semester and the deliverables for the project completed and defended in the second semester. Students must complete **and** defend their proposal **before** enrolling in the last second semester of project hours. Students who do not complete and defend their proposal in the first semester in which they are enrolled in project hours have the option of extending their graduation another semester or taking comprehensive exams instead. Students may not enroll in all project hours in the same semester.

A 3-credit project can all be done in one semester. Students who choose the 3-credit project option must also take comprehensive exams.

## Graduate project guidelines – proposal components

The purpose of the proposal meeting is for the student's committee to review the proposed graduate project and to agree with the student on the specifics of the project to be undertaken. Once the three members of the committee and the student sign off on the specifics of what is expected of the student through this proposal, any substantive changes must be made with the approval of the full committee.

This proposal should include any background information necessary to establishing the context of the project and a detailed description of what the student plans to produce for the project.

For example, if a student were to propose an Integrated Marketing Communication campaign to promote a new initiative for the Wichita-Sedgwick County Historical Society that created a club for high school students to create exhibits for the museum, the background information might include summaries of best practices from other historical museums with similar clubs, an analysis of what promotions the WSCHS has done in the past, a survey of local high school seniors to ask what types of messages appeal to them and how they want to receive the information, and applied information from trade journals on how to reach and appeal to high school students. This background information would then support the proposed deliverables that might include a Facebook page, Twitter posts, fliers, teacher packets, and the creation of a website.

As another example, if a student were to propose an in-depth civic journalism project — in print, broadcast, online or some multi-media combination (including blogs and social media) — extensive research, interviews and observation would be required prior to the development of content for a mass audience. The subject of the project would likely be of local concern, but the reporting must include a national/world view of how the issue affects citizens. The project would require the supervision of a working professional and a faculty member with extensive field experience. In addition to traditional reporting, special attention should be paid to using academic research, computer assisted reporting (data mining), and conducting surveys and focus groups. The writing should be incisive, thought provoking, and professional in content, quality and impact. The outcome of the project should help readers understand a particular problem and create solutions for change.

### Graduate project guidelines – written components

A graduate project in the MAC program should contain both a written paper and a professional product. The proposal includes #1, 2, and 3 below and is given to the committee before the proposal defense. Once the project is complete, the student adds #4 and 5 to the proposal text and gives a completed final copy to the committee.

- 1) All written proposals should begin with an executive summary of the project as a whole. This may include, for example, why the student became interested in the topic/work, an explanation of the situation that this work will contribute to, how this work meets the goals and objectives of the person or group the project is intended for, what approach or method the student used in completing the work, and a summary of the finished produced product. Typically 1 page in length, this often written last, after all other work is completed.
- 2) The second section of the project proposal explains the background related to the project. This may include, for example, an explanation of industry standards on a topic or approach, a history of the organization the project is for, best practices of similar work, relevant academic research and theory pertaining to the topic, etc. This section

allows the student to show his or her expertise on the topic and lay the groundwork for the chosen approach explained in the next section.

- 3) The third section of the graduate project will be a clear discussion and delineation of the process the student will use in undertaking the project and a clear justification for the appropriateness of this methodology. This may include, for example, information on people to be interviewed, a creative brief, follow-up surveys/focus groups/in-depth interviews to be conducted, other data or information to be collected, a timeline, etc. (The above is not an exhaustive list. Decisions about what is appropriate to include in a methodology section will depend on the nature of the project undertaken. A discussion regarding appropriate methods should be undertaken with a student's advisor).

Note, for the proposal, the methodology section is typically written in the future tense as activities have not yet been undertaken. In the final project, the methodology section is typically edited to be written in the past tense.

- 4) The fourth section of the professional project will contain a copy of the final product undertaken through the project. This will be what material is turned in to the organization, business, etc. involved with the graduate project. This section should include a copy of every piece produced for the project. If the work is digital in nature (i.e., video, radio, social media, etc.), an electronic version should be attached. If a website or other easily changed pieces are produced, hard or archived digital copies of the work should be included.
- 5) The fifth section of the professional project may contain a conclusion and recommendations section, at the discretion of the student's advisor. This may include an analysis of the strengths and limitations of the project as carried out. What worked well? What could have been done more efficiently? What recommendations for future efforts can be made? What was learned by the student from this process? What needs for additional work have been identified through this project (areas of future inquiry or research)? The concluding section generally relates the particular project back to the information in the second section.

A digital copy of the whole project must be submitted to the MAC graduate coordinator in addition to digital or hard copies to committee members as requested.

### Graduate project guidelines – oral components

- 1) The first oral component is the proposal presentation. This is usually a PPT presentation given to the whole committee before work begins on the deliverables. The student should plan to speak for about 20-30 minutes, going over highlights from the proposal itself. Since everyone will have already read the proposal, the presentation should simply be a refresher on what got the student interested in the topic, what the student hopes to accomplish, and the highlights from the best practices section. Most of the time should be spent on the methods section explaining the scope of the project and as much

detail as possible on the deliverables. This should also include some kind of timeline for the work. Once the presentation is over, the committee and students engage in a Q&A session until everyone has agreed on what the project will include and how it will be accomplished. Any deviations from the written proposal should be captured by the student and sent in an email to the whole committee after the proposal meeting. This way everyone is clear on the expectations. There is not paperwork for the committee to fill out at this point.

- 2) Upon completion of a student's professional project, the student's committee is given finished copies of the graduate project from above. The student will collaborate with his or her committee to schedule an oral presentation of the project. The student should work with his or her advisor to establish what should be in this presentation. After the presentation, the committee can engage the student in a Q&A discussion session.
- 3) Upon the completion of the oral presentation component of the professional project, committee members will make any final recommendations for changes to the student's project report and establish a timeline for final changes to be made. Should the committee agree that changes are minor, committee members may decide to sign the Notice of Completion form at that time. Should the committee agree collectively or should any individual member believe that significant work is still needed to complete the project, that member, or the full committee can wait to sign the Notice of Completion form pending appropriate changes.

## Thesis

### Overview

As a culminating experience toward completion of a MA in Communication degree, a thesis is a scholarly paper that allows you to answer a research question(s) you are interested using one or more research methods. Each thesis includes the following:

- Students select a three-person committee (a chair and additional member from the ESC graduate faculty and an outside graduate faculty member from another WSU department) to guide the project.
- Students must enroll for 6 credits of thesis (COMM 875 or COMM 876).
- Each thesis must begin with a proposal and end with a completed thesis, all delivered in written form and defended orally.

### Committee

The student will work with an academic advisor (who serves as the chair for the student's committee) to develop a plan for the thesis. This advisor must be a member of the ESC graduate faculty. In addition, the committee will include a second ESC graduate faculty member and one external graduate faculty member from another department at WSU. This committee will help

guide the student through the proposal and final thesis/defense process. All final decisions about a thesis will be made in collaboration with the student's academic advisor.

### How to find an external thesis committee member

If you are writing a thesis, you will need to have an external member who is full graduate faculty in a department outside of the ESC. The graduate school will not allow external members from outside of the university, so it needs to be a WSU faculty member.

The best way to start to look for an external member is to look at the websites of departments that relate to your topic. For example, if you are interested in political advertising, look at the political science department. If you are interested in IMC or strategic communication, you might try marketing or psychology. Many of our students work with topics that relate to sociology or sports marketing as well. Think broadly about your topic and then read about the research and teaching interests of faculty in those departments. Most of this you should be able to find on their website.

Once you have a short list of possible external members, make sure those people are eligible to be an external member of a thesis committee. The external member must be someone who is full graduate faculty (GF). This list [https://www.wichita.edu/academics/graduate\\_school/documents/GFS\\_webList.pdf](https://www.wichita.edu/academics/graduate_school/documents/GFS_webList.pdf) shows who is full graduate faculty (listed as GF) and who is Associate Graduate Faculty (listed as AF). Once you have a list that only includes GF faculty, consult with your thesis chair about who might be the best person to approach.

When you and your thesis chair have narrowed down a potential external member, you want to tell them a bit about your thesis (even if it's still somewhat vague at this point) and ask if they would be interested and willing to serve as an external member. You can make an appointment to meet them in their office or send them a long and detailed email. I strongly suggest meeting them in person. This gives you the opportunity to see just how interested they are in your topic and how easy they would be to work with. If they have any ideas that would be helpful, it's much better to get them as early in the process as possible. You don't want your first meeting to be your proposal defense. If it doesn't seem like a good fit when you meet with them, just thank them for their time and say you will look for someone else whose interests more closely align with yours.

### Credit Hours

For a thesis, the 6 hours of credits (COMM 875 and COMM 876) must be spread over two consecutive semesters. The proposal is completed and defended in the first semester and the thesis is written and defended in the second semester. Students must complete **and** defend their proposal **before** enrolling in COMM 876. Students who do not complete and defend their proposal in the semester in which they are enrolled in COMM 875 have the option of extending their graduation another semester or taking comprehensive exams instead. Students may not enroll in COMM 875 and COMM 876 in the same semester.

## Hitting a Wall

Things will go wrong in this process. It's just a fact. You may have trouble recruiting participants. Or your data results may not be significant. Or you may wish you had asked different research questions half-way through the process. Or you may end up swimming in data or information and not feel like you can work through it. This happens. It's all perfectly normal.

Here's what you can do:

1. Don't panic. It doesn't help.
2. Talk to your advisor and the other committee members. This is what we are here for.
3. Talk to your peers. Sometimes just talking through a problem brings clarity.
4. Keep plugging away. The only thesis that counts is a finished and approved thesis. If it's not exactly what you dreamed it would be, adjust and keep going.

Above all, remember that writing a thesis is more about learning the research process and less about having a perfect study that saves the world.

## Thesis guidelines – proposal components

The purpose of the proposal meeting is for the student's committee to review the proposed thesis and to agree with the student on the specifics of the research to be undertaken. Once the three members of the committee and the student sign off on the specifics of what is expected of the student through this proposal, any substantive changes must be made with the approval of the full committee. Think of this proposal as your way of showing what you know about the topic, what you specifically want to find out, and how you plan to do that. You want to be as detailed as possible on all of those for two reasons. 1) This is your chance to make a strong case for what you plan to do and why it's a good idea. 2) This is in some sense a contract between you and the committee. By spelling out the scope of the work as clearly as possible, you protect yourself from the committee making significant changes later. This doesn't mean that things can't change. Invariably deadlines shift, questions are reworded, protocols are changed, pandemics happen, etc., but by everyone agreeing to the proposal what can't happen is that someone on your committee decides later that they want you to make significant changes to your research. If you and your advisor agree changes are necessary for whatever reason, you can get approval quickly from your committee and move forward.

A proposal has 4 main parts: an introduction, literature review, research questions/hypotheses, and methods.

## Introduction

Here you want to set the stage for the paper. Draw in the reader with some background, something interesting, and the main point you want to make with your paper. If appropriate, try to ground your topic in the time period in which it is set. If it touches on a contemporary issue or concern, you can explain that. If it is something that will help us understand a bigger issue, explain that. Mostly you want to pull in the reader.

This is your chance to explain the significance of the topic or concern. In other words, this is the “why should I care” part. In this section, clearly explain why this study is important. This may include why you are interested in it in the first place. How is relevant today? Is it timely and, if so, how? How does your study fit into the bigger picture? Are you replicating what others have done or are you contributing a new piece of the puzzle?

### Literature Review

This section gives an overview of the research done on your topic. The idea is to show what has been done on all the various aspects of your topic and then show how your work fits into this picture. It should be clear from this section that you have a strong understanding of what has been done on your topic or issue. The literature review should not read as an annotated bibliography or a general description of what is known. Instead, the works should be synthesized by topic or chronologically and offer analysis and evaluation. This is where you can identify any gaps in the literature, particularly those you think you can fill with your work.

If you plan to use a theory in your thesis, you can choose to put information about the theory in the literature review and/or the methods section. In most theses, some part of the literature review is devoted to the theory. This often includes a brief (paragraph or two) history of the theory itself, a clear definition of the theory and any related terms, and some review of the literature that has used the theory in a similar way that you plan to. If you are using a theory in a way that has not been done before, you will need to explain that thoroughly, including why you want to and why you think it will work.

### Research Question

Depending on what method you plan to use, you will either have research questions or hypotheses. It’s very tempting to include a number of research questions or hypotheses. We are, after all, researchers and are curious about everything. In general, it’s a good rule of thumb to limit your research questions/hypotheses to between 1-4. Remember, this is a thesis, not a lifetime project. Yes, it’s important to ask questions that you want to know the answer to. But you do want to graduate this year. Think of this thesis as the beginning of a research career, not the end. Choose a small focus that you can do well in the time you have. Then plan to do more research to answer other questions in the future. Above all, create your research questions or hypotheses with your advisor. Your advisor can help you focus in on what is both practical (from the standpoint of time and resources) and achievable methodologically.

### Research Design and Method

In this section you clearly explain what you plan to do with as much detail as possible. The detail part cannot be stressed enough. Begin with clearly defining your terms including all variables. Explain how you plan to gather your sources/subjects and describe them as much as possible. Then explain what method you plan to use to answer your research questions. Again, walk the reader through step by step on how you plan to gather your data and then how you plan to analyze the data. If you are using a theory, explain how you will apply it in your analysis. If you are doing a survey or focus group, include the questions you plan to use. Think of this section as a guide to teaching someone how to replicate what you plan to do.

## ESC COMM 111 students as subjects

As an ESC grad student, you are welcome to recruit subjects with the ESC SONA system. SONA is the system that manages research studies so that ESC undergraduate students can sign up to be subjects and get research credit for their classes. Dr. Min Xiao is the contact person for everything having to do with SONA. If you need subjects for surveys, experiments, or focus groups, please contact him EARLY in the thesis process to make sure your study is a good fit for our students. Although all WSU students have to take COMM 111, which gives us good diversity across the student body, we do have a limited number of subjects available each semester. Dr. Xiao can also help you determine how many subjects you will need for your project. If your study needs more subjects than we can reasonably accommodate, you can either pay to use Mechanical Turk or revise your study to narrow its focus.

## Proposal Defense

Before jumping into writing the proposal, you will need to set up a schedule with your advisor for guidance and feedback. Generally meeting every other week while working on a thesis is about right. If you want to meet more or less often, work with your advisor to set up something you are both comfortable with. Usually students turn in sections of the proposal to their advisor for feedback as they work on it. Again, deadlines for sections of the proposal should be set up with your advisor. Some advisors like to get sections to read and review prior to meeting with their students while others prefer to have students turn in their latest drafts when they meet.

Once your advisor has signed off on the proposal, you need to email your thesis proposal (pdf is fine) to the rest of the committee and set up a time for your defense. Academic courtesy says you should give your committee two weeks to read the proposal before you meet. The proposal defense should take about an hour, but plan to block out an hour and a half.

Before emailing everyone to set up a meeting, check with your advisor for available times. Then contact the other two members of your committee to work out a time that works for everyone.

The proposal can either be in person or on Zoom. If you choose to be in person, you will need to work with Amy Solano ([amy.solano@wichita.edu](mailto:amy.solano@wichita.edu)) to reserve a room. Once you have agreed on a day and time (and have secured a location, if necessary) email to confirm with everyone. The day before the meeting, send out a friendly reminder that includes either the Zoom link or the location.

Within 24 hours of the proposal defense, email the committee with a list of changes/corrections/additions/etc. that were agreed on in the meeting. This email is important as it makes clear what the new expectations are for your final thesis. If someone on the committee believes your list is inaccurate, they can then correct it before you get too far down the wrong road. If you don't clearly spell out what was discussed, you will have to rely on everyone's understanding of what was said. This rarely ends well.

## Institutional Review Board (IRB)

If you need to submit for IRB approval, this is done immediately after your proposal so that you can incorporate any necessary changes from your proposal defense. Many students take the two weeks between sending out their proposal to their committee and the proposal defense to get their IRB materials together. A few things to remember about an IRB proposal

([https://www.wichita.edu/research/documents/Revised\\_IRB\\_Application\\_Feb2019-RE.pdf](https://www.wichita.edu/research/documents/Revised_IRB_Application_Feb2019-RE.pdf)):

1. Your advisor will need to be the Principal Investigator (PI). You are second on the list.
2. You do need to fill out the whole form.
3. Most likely your work will be exempt, but you will still need to turn in everything even if you are asking for “exempt.”
4. You will need to turn in any focus group or survey questions you plan to ask with the form.
5. You will need to turn in any recruiting material you plan to use to recruit subjects. This includes social media posts, emails to students and/or instructors, posters, news blasts, etc.
6. If you plan to use the ESC Comm 111 students, you will need to submit the text you plan to use on SONA as well.

Once your IRB package is approved you may **NOT** make any changes to your protocols, survey questions, recruiting materials, informed consent, etc. In other words, once everything you submitted is approved, you can **NOT** change any part of it without getting approval again from IRB. Consider it etched in stone. This includes even little things like making a social media post to get more participants. If you didn't have it approved to begin with, you can **NOT** do it until it is sent back through IRB. This may sound picky and over-the-top, but we take it seriously at the university.

## Final Thesis Defense

Again, you will work with your advisor to set up times to meet and get feedback on your progress. If you plan to use SONA to access ESC students as subjects, you will need to set up a meeting with Dr. Xiao to discuss how to move forward with your study.

The final thesis will include the sections from your proposal with the addition of the results/ findings, discussion, and conclusion. Remember to go back through your proposal to change future tense to past tense where appropriate now that you have completed the project. Make sure to include any material you used to gather data such as survey questions, focus group question guides, etc., as an appendix at the end of your thesis.

Just as with the proposal, your advisor will need to give the green light before you send out your final thesis to your committee. Again, please give the committee two weeks to read your final thesis. Schedule your final defense just as you did your proposal defense by checking with your advisor first and then working with the rest of the committee to set up a meeting. Again, this meeting can be in person or through Zoom but you will need to reserve a room if you want it to be in person. The final defense will also need to be scheduled with the graduate school. This gives them notice to send out the extra paperwork the external committee member will fill out.

After your final defense you will need to follow the graduate school guidelines to format your thesis before it will be approved by them. This is very important and time consuming. Yes, it's nit-picky and a lot of work to force your document into their style guide. But they can (and will) keep you from graduating if you don't do it. If you don't understand something, please ask. They are generally very helpful and willing to guide you through the changes if you are willing to work with them.

The last thing you need to do for the thesis is fill out the Final Report for IRB.

<https://www.wichita.edu/research/IRB/IRB-Final-Report-Form.pdf>

Please make sure to fill this out for your project and give it to your advisor for signature before you graduate.

## Comprehensive Exams

### Overview

Comprehensive exams (or "comps") gives you the opportunity to pull together all that you have learned in your graduate program. Students consistently say after finishing comps that they enjoyed the process because it made them aware of all that they had learned in the program and how that knowledge could be applied in the future. Comprehensive exams do NOT count as credit hours. Comps are taken in addition to the 36 hours of credit required for the program.

### Selecting a Committee

You will need to select a chair for your committee first. This should be someone who has full graduate faculty status. In addition, the committee will need to include two other ESC graduate faculty members. Typically, these are faculty whom you have had classes from. For all three members, you will need to contact them individually and ask if they are willing to serve on your committee. Once you have your committee set, please email the graduate coordinator with a list of who is on your committee, who is your chair, and what semester you wish to take the exam.

### The exam itself

Your chair will contact the other two members of your committee to ask for suggested questions for you. The bulk of the exam (about 2/3) will be questions related to the communication discipline, methods, and theory. The other 1/3 of your exam should address other elective courses you have taken. It is up to the chair to decide if you will be given choices of questions or just a simple list of required questions. Most faculty, however, give multiple options for each set of questions. Again, the point of the exam is to pull together all that you have learned in the program so each question is likely to incorporate multiple aspects.

The chair then makes up the exam and emails it to you. You will have 6 weeks from the time you receive the exam to write out the answers and return your answers to your committee. We

strongly encourage you to take the time to research each question and support all arguments with relevant academic literature.

When preparing your answers, please remember that your committee will judge your answers by the depth of understanding and breadth of analysis demonstrated in what you write. Your answer should include all aspects of the question (don't leave any parts out) and go beyond simple answers to explain the implication(s) and meaning(s) of the subject. A good answer not only answers the direct question, but also offers support through citing specific scholars and their significant works, respected theories, case studies, examples from class, etc. Citing text books and other reference works (encyclopedias, dictionaries, thesauruses, etc.) is not acceptable. When you cite specific works, please make sure that your readers can identify the work you cite. As you write out your answers, make sure that they are complete, in-depth, analytical, and well written. Poorly written, incomplete, or unsupported answers often result in a re-write.

For each question, you have page limits of 4-6 pages for short questions and 6-10 pages for long questions. It must also be 12-point Times or New Roman type with 1-inch margins. Endnotes and other references do not count in the page limits. Feel free to ask any of your committee members about the wording of questions if you don't understand what is being asked. However, it is not appropriate to ask more specific questions about actual content.

On or before the day the exam answers are due, please email both the exam answers and the original list of questions to everyone on your committee. The committee will take 2-3 weeks to grade the exam and get your results back to you.

For each question, students are given one of three evaluations: clear pass, rewrite needed, clear fail. If a rewrite is needed for some or all of the exam, your committee will provide feedback to help you correct or clarify your answer. Your advisor will give you a specific period of time to return your rewrites back to the committee. Once you are done with your rewrites, the committee will evaluate the exam again. If any questions are clear fails, it is up to the chair to decide if the student rewrites the whole exam or starts over with a new questions. This **very** rarely happens.

## Academic Honesty

Students who compromise the integrity of the classroom are subject to disciplinary action on the part of the University. This includes all academic work done for the MAC program. Violations of classroom standards include:

- Cheating in any form, whether in formal examinations or elsewhere.
- Plagiarism, using the work of others as one's own without assigning proper credit to the source.
- Misrepresentation of any work done in the classroom or in preparation for class.
- Falsification, forgery, or alteration of any documents pertaining to academic records.

- Disruptive behavior in a course of study or abusiveness toward faculty or fellow students.

It is up to individual faculty members to establish punishment for academic dishonesty. Please be aware that charges of academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, can trigger expulsion from the program.