

# **Graduate Handbook**



DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION

# **Graduate Handbook**

A RESOURCE FOR COMMUNICATION GRADUATE STUDENTS AT  
NORTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY, FARGO.

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# Contents

**I. Introduction: The Nature of Graduate Study.**  
7

**II. Let's Get Started.**  
15

**III. Moving Along.**  
21

**Graduate Communication at NDSU: A Snapshot.**  
34

**Appendix One: Fifteen Steps to Completing a Disquisition in  
the Department of Communication.**  
35

**Appendix Two: Comprehensive Study (Non-Thesis) Options.**  
41

**Appendix Three: Formal Admission Requirements: Master's  
Degree Program.**  
47

**Appendix Four: Formal Admission Requirements: Ph.D.  
Degree program.**  
49

**Essential Sidebars:**

**Graduate Study at NDSU.**

**11**

**Selected Education/Research Specialties of NDSU Communication Faculty.**

**17**

**Some Recent Communication Theses/Paper Titles.**

**23**

**How to Pay for Graduate Study.**

**29**

**Presenting and Publishing.**

**31**

**Serve Yourself.**

**37**

**Where Are They Now? Some Recent NDSU Communication Master's Graduates.**

**45**

# **Introduction: The Nature of Graduate Study**

**WELCOME BACK** TO AN OLD WORLD, and welcome to a new world. As a graduate student, you are by now familiar with the rhythm of formal education.

You've spent at least 16 years and maybe more full time in school, including innumerable classes, even more innumerable examinations, papers, and projects.

You know what it takes to be a good student, and no doubt you are one—because graduate schools only accept the best.

But the new course of study you have chosen is not quite the same as the one you know. You may look upon your years of school as a funnel, from learning the very general underpinnings of literacy, through continual specialization, until, as a university senior, you spent most of the time specializing in your chosen field, the narrow part of the funnel. But graduate students may be surprised to find out that study at this level is a break in the continuity.

### **The nature of graduate study**

As undergraduates, we are intent on learning all about our fields. In communication, that means studying the general theories of communication as established by scholars and practitioners, and learning some practical techniques of “how to communicate.” Mass communicators emphasize competence in written communication, for news articles, public relations and many other media specialties. Speech communicators emphasize competence in spoken communication, for formal public speaking, meetings and many other specialties. Generally, though, the emphasis is on learning what others have discovered, from instructors and textbooks, gaining an underpinning of the theory as well as learning the skills.

Many students—in fact, most—go no further, and immediately put their new skills and knowledge to use in the marketplace. Usually they find they have reached the minimum necessary for job survival, but likely will have to polish their skills to a much higher level of competence if they are to thrive or even advance modestly. The broader, more reflective, more theoretical view of their field surveyed during their undergraduate education stays with them, but fades into the background as workday skill and competence in the trenches become essential for survival.

Graduate study, however, offers you the time to step back again to a broader, reflective view of communication, to help improve your understanding of the discipline as well as your professional performance in a job.

Many prospective graduate students believe that’s the sole reason for returning to the university, and it is one of the big ones. But it’s only part.

From the time you enrolled in Communication 101 you've perhaps thought of yourself mostly a receptacle, to be filled by knowledge from others. But now you are expected to become a producer.

Perhaps the most important courses in graduate school emphasize the background you need to become a generator of new knowledge, by producing research. What is research? For many people, research can be all sorts of things: you don't know where to buy a car, so you do a little research, reading car guides, consumer magazines, talking to sales people. Or perhaps you research the reasons why the local mayor supports a new stadium or business deal, so you can be an informed voter.

**You may look upon your years of school as a funnel.**

Academic research asks for a more specific definition of research, however. In communication, for instance, research often requires the application of a particular, rigorous, and widely-tested and systematic method or theoretical model to a specific collection of data. Students use this method to draw a specific conclusion that can stand up to close academic scrutiny.

The idea that research should be done based on empirical (observable) investigations relying on systematic methods dates from the beginning of modern learning. If we take a methodical, skeptical, questioning approach to gathering our knowledge, maybe we can come to some conclusions that really can be valuable to others.

In fact, we can perhaps find out something truly original, something no one else knew before. The old truism "there's nothing new under the sun" really does not apply to research, and that's what's so enticing to many of us in academics. You actually do have the opportunity to add something new to humanity's millennia-long search for knowledge. How many of your friends can say this?

Before the beginnings of scientific research methods a couple centuries ago, how did people learn what they knew? People generalized from their own experience, made assumptions based on hearsay and superstition, or believed what "authorities" told them was true. People were

condemned for questioning those authorities, or ridiculed for doubting the “common sense” of one person’s experience. Women burned on a stake in colonial America because “someone said” they were witches. We may ridicule this tragically silly approach to knowledge, but all around us today, people continue to draw conclusions from very little evidence, from feelings or from dubious “authorities.”

Sometimes that’s not a bad thing: after all, most of your undergraduate knowledge came from authorities. Too, a few years’ experience in the trenches can be valuable. And people sometimes do know what they’re talking about. As a graduate student, however, you begin to realize the limitations of learning this way, and the possibilities of learning based on the systematic investigation of research. In doing that you are undertaking the task of careful gathering, analysis and interpretation of data that can be turned into new knowledge. This is the meaning of academic research. It asks you, then, to no longer be a mere receptacle of knowledge in your chosen field. Now you will be a producer of new knowledge for your colleagues and the public. You will truly become a master of your field. And that’s a pretty exciting challenge.

#### **Master’s level research and study**

Graduate faculty in this department know that while you are likely a skilled student, as a researcher you are probably a first-year again. To direct you, instructors who are themselves highly-skilled researchers, nearly always Ph.D.-level scholars, set up a series of required research-based courses and advising to help you discover this new approach to academic learning. Below are the core requirements of the communication department’s master’s program (2001). For Ph.D. requirements see the appendix.

Comm 700, Research Methods in Communication. A general introduction to many methods researchers use to plan research projects, and to gauge their value when applied to different questions.

## Graduate Study at NDSU

First master's degree awarded: 1899.

First Ph.D. awarded: 1963.

Number of graduate programs, master's level: 40.

Number of graduate programs, Ph.D. level: 20.

Total number of master's degrees awarded, 1899-1999: 7,987.

Total number of Ph.D. degrees awarded, 1963-1999: 852.

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Comm 637, Mass Communication Theory. An in-depth examination of the state of research, addressing what we think we understand about communication.

Comm 721, Intercultural Communication. Exploration of ways many cultures and groups communicate.

### *The master's degree research tools*

This nine-credit core helps prepare you for your entry into what likely will be a new world for you, communication research. Depending on whether you choose to pursue an M.A. or an M.S., you are also required to complete six credits of "research tools." Students who wish to become experts in statistically-based research normally enroll in the M.S., which requires work in quantitative research methods and statistics. Students who opt for the M.A. focus on qualitative or rhetorical research methods, but often wisely complete some statistics-related coursework anyway, because many communication researchers rely on statistics to help find research answers that are methodologically sound. (At NDSU,

about one-third of communication master's students choose the M.S. option.) Below are research tool requirements offered by the department. Two are required. M.A. students must choose either Soc 700 or Comm 767; M.S. students must choose Soc 701 or Stat 725.

Comm 767, Rhetorical Criticism. Explores critical methods of inquiry and offers a framework for critical evaluation of communication.

Soc 700, Qualitative Methods. Emphasizes research methods including intensive interviewing, focus groups and participant observation.

Soc 701, Quantitative Methods. Emphasizes research methods including survey design, experimental design and evaluation. Completion of a 300-level undergraduate class in statistics, or Stat 725, is required for enrollment.

Stat 725, Applied Statistics. Explores data description, probability, inference on means and other statistical topics.

*The master's level elective specialization*

These classes comprise 15 credits, one-half of the 30 required for the master's degree. To complete the rest of the credits, students normally consult with their advisors to build an elective specialization reflecting their interests. The department offers the flexibility of nine to 12 credits in an elective specialization, which may include graduate-level classes in other departments suitable to the student's goals. The balance of the credits are fulfilled by the disquisition.

**What is a disquisition?**

Disquisition generally refers to any kind of formal scholarly inquiry. At NDSU, that includes Ph.D. dissertations, master's theses, essays or other academic projects. But most students at the master's or Ph.D. levels talk about their thesis or dissertation, the final focus of two to four or more years of writing and study.

A thesis or dissertation is an extended piece of research-based writing giving the researcher an opportunity to state a position or ask a question, examine what others have written on the subject, set up a reliable way to evaluate that position, evaluate, and discuss the findings. How precisely that is done depends on what research method you use, but the one thing you need to keep in mind is the word position.

Let's say you bring your car to the shop because it's not starting in the morning. Because it's often the case that cars won't start because the battery is worn out, you tell the mechanic you want a new battery. It is, therefore, your position that your car battery is a goner.

The mechanic, however, runs a number of checks on your car, and finds out that the battery is actually okay, but the charging system is faulty. Your original position, or thesis, has been disproven by subsequent research.

A thesis, then, is a position you tentatively offer concerning a problem. The word "thesis," from the Greek word meaning "place," can be broken into several "hypo-theses," each hypothesis contributing to your basic thesis. In a thesis, you must argue a position. It's not enough merely to describe what you saw, or gather interviews, or write an essay about television, or do a series of book reports.

A thesis counts six credits toward the 30 you need for a master's degree, and a dissertation counts 30 credits toward the 90 you need for a Ph.D. (30 transferred from the master's degree). Both must be proposed and defended in front of a committee, usually four Ph.D-level faculty, including your advisor. The comprehensive study (non-thesis) option for master's students is likely not as wide-ranging, and may not reach the theoretical rigor of a thesis, but it only counts for three credits. It also must be proposed and defended, similar to a thesis. Some master's students find that non-thesis projects take even more work than standard theses. If you have special interests that don't fit well into the thesis framework, however, the project may a better choice for you. Secondary school teachers and other working professionals often choose the applied option, which allows them to incorporate what they've learned more directly into their daily activities at work. On the other hand, if as a

master's student you think you'll go on for a Ph.D. someday, you'll prepare yourself better by doing a standard thesis. For more information on the project option, see Appendix Two. Generally, when we refer to your thesis in this guide, we mean thesis, project or dissertation, as the formal procedures for writing and approval are the same. (The comprehensive paper option is not available to Ph.D. students.)

A disquisition must be written in a form approved by the university, and guidelines are meticulous. Details are spelled out in the NDSU Graduate School's, *Guidelines for the Preparation of Disquisitions*, available from the Varsity Mart, graduate dean's office, or on line: [www.ndsu.nodak.edu/ndsu/academic/bulletins/graduate/disq-guidelines/](http://www.ndsu.nodak.edu/ndsu/academic/bulletins/graduate/disq-guidelines/). Every graduate student should read this booklet BEFORE starting to organize a thesis or dissertation.

# Let's Get Started

## **What procedures do I follow to complete a disquisition?**

Because the procedure is somewhat formal, for several years the department has provided graduate students with a handout, "Fifteen Steps to Completing a Disquisition." These steps may be found in Appendix One.

OVER THE YEARS FACULTY MEMBERS HAVE BEEN DISAPPOINTED to see some of their advisees leave the academic world without the coveted qualification they paid so much for, in both time and money. Students fail for many reasons, but some common ones happen over and over, usually traced to a misunderstanding along the way. Here are a few of the most common. The little narratives are based on a collection of unfortunate experiences faculty have seen over the years.

### 1. Not understanding the nature of graduate study.

Bill was an ad agency account executive, financially quite successful, who graduated in speech communication from a state university a few years ago. In dealing with clients, he noticed that more than a few expected him to have a strong background in advertising copywriting, especially for broadcast. Bill had not studied media writing at university, however, and was unsure of professional methods and expectations. But, Bill thought, why waste time doing a second bachelor's degree? To learn more about media writing, Bill enrolled for a master's degree in mass communication.

Bill was disappointed with his courses almost immediately. No one talked much about the nuts and bolts of writing for the media. Instead, he was forced to study authors and concepts far removed from his practi-

cal goals. After a disappointing year, Bill dropped out.

Bill's disappointment is an example of a student assuming grad school is merely an extension of undergraduate education. While some programs do offer more applied work than others, graduate work at NDSU generally emphasizes understanding larger concepts and adding new knowledge to the discipline through academic research. The department's Ph.D. emphasizes applied communication, or "action-oriented research" within an academic framework unlike that offered at the undergraduate level.

2. Underestimating the amount of work necessary.

Jill particularly enjoyed reading and collecting interesting facts related to her job. As a public relations officer for a local health care facility, sometimes she was asked to develop longer papers relating to employment trends in the health care industry. She thought that graduate study in communication would give her the opportunity to continue her hospital work but get college credit for it.

Jill's disappointment did not begin until well into her second year as a part-time student. As part of a research methods class, she was asked to formulate a prospectus for a possible dissertation. She wrote up results of her studies on hospital employment trends, noting "it would only take a few interviews" to turn it into a dissertation. Her instructor, however, was not convinced. He said her study was certainly of interest to the hospital industry, and might even be publishable in a health care trade magazine, but that it lacked a more formal data-gathering method required for original academic research. She might be able to turn her work into a project or paper, requiring a smaller research method base, but still would have to complete a literature search and employ a more rigorous standard. Disappointed but determined, Jill took her instructor's advice and did considerably more work than she'd anticipated.

Prospective graduate students sometimes bring a project completed as part of their job, or even as part of a freelance writing hobby, and believe they only have to take a few classes to turn it into a thesis. Usually this is not the case. A thesis is a major piece of academic research using

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### **Selected Education/Research Specialties of NDSU Communication Faculty**

**Ph.D.s from**

- University of Cambridge
- Indiana University
- University of Minnesota
- University of Nebraska
- University of North Dakota
- Southern Illinois University
- University of Utah
- Wayne State University

- Environmental Communication
- Family Communication
- Gendered Communication
- Forensics
- Intercultural Communication
- International Development
- Media Ethics
- Media History
- Organizational Communication
- Pedagogy
- Popular Culture
- Print Journalism
- Public Address
- Public Relations
- Rhetorical Criticism

**Specialties include**

- Broadcasting
- Communication Education
- Communication Law
- Action-Oriented Research Methodology
- Communication Theory

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accepted methods to advance a defensible conclusion. It should not be beyond the capabilities of any good student willing to listen carefully to their instructors' and advisor's direction. But seldom is it simply a re-hashed work project.

Related to this are the students who sailed through their undergraduate education dashing off quick papers the night before they were due. Graduate students are expected to write at a higher level of competence, however, and new graduates who rely on the old procrastinate/pound-it-out approach often finish their first term with what one communication faculty member calls "the Cs or worse wake-up call." Writing standards are higher at the graduate level, especially in communication studies. Again, instructors do not make demands beyond the abilities of students—if the department didn't think you were capable, the graduate director or committee wouldn't have accepted your application in the first

place. But instructors do expect reasonably polished and mature work that reflects careful thought and revision.

3. Overestimating the amount of work necessary.

Phil was an excellent undergraduate student, who graduated from a private college with high honors. After teaching secondary school a few years, he saw the financial and intellectual advantages of a graduate degree, and was accepted immediately at a nearby state university. Phil flew through his graduate courses with straight As, just as he had as an undergraduate, and began work on his thesis before most of his classmates. Phil was excited—he planned a thesis designed to “set the communication discipline on its ear.” His committee had approved his prospectus, a study of business communication in a small group setting. One committee member did warn Phil, however, that his topic was quite broad and ambitious.

As Phil began to research, he was surprised to find the amount of material available that he thought he had to read to do a good job on his thesis. Weeks turned into months, but Phil still had pages of bibliographical sources to scour through. Finally his advisor suggested he limit his work to a narrow time period, or a narrow part of the industry. Phil was unwilling to do this, because it would make his results less significant, less publishable. Phil procrastinated, and as the months turned into years he tried to forget about his graduate failure.

A thesis is not a book, not an article. It is, in essence, only one thing: a sustained piece of research designed to prove to a committee of four or five scholars that you are capable of graduate-level work. You may wish to add to it later, to turn it into something publishable, but as a student your first goal is to listen closely to your advisor and your committee, and to follow their advice.

4. Not having a thesis.

Lil was a passionate supporter of civil rights for Native Americans. As an undergraduate she was instrumental in persuading her university athletic program to drop its venerable team nickname, the Braves. As a

mass communication major she used her developing skills to write and promote her interests, and attracted state-wide attention for her essays. Lil went straight to master's level work after graduating, believing a graduate degree could help strengthen her professional credibility.

Her committee was not enthusiastic about her thesis prospectus, however. She had presented it to committee members only with the exasperated approval of her advisor, who told her that, while it was a reasonably competent essay, it didn't meet graduate research expectations. She didn't believe her advisor, but Lil's committee told her the same thing. One

committee member asked her

**Intriguing, enlightening, exhilarating, even fun—that's what learning is all about.**

what her hypothesis was. "That Native Americans have been exploited, and still are," she declared. How did she plan to test this hypothesis, the instructor asked. Lil was indignant. "Why do I have to test what everyone knows to be true?"

Lil's committee told her to prepare a more limited and moderate research question, propose a research model, and re-submit her prospectus. Lil thought these recommendations were pointless, and dropped out of the graduate program.

Graduate level research is not an opportunity for students to grind personal axes or re-hash an old prejudice. Competent researchers must put biases aside for a fair inquiry based on investigative methods which meet the rigorous test of academic research. Students may turn a thesis into an essay or polemic if they wish—after they obtain their master's degree.

##### 5. Not having a focus.

Syl admitted he had not done super-well as a speech undergraduate. Between his roommate's nightly parties and his own fondness for the sports channel, he'd barely missed flunking out his freshman year. He did manage to pull up his grade point average, finally, graduating with a 2.8.

Syl worked a year in sales, but he wasn't really happy. He thought he

liked communication, though, and did miss the friends and fun times he had at his old university. He decided to apply for graduate school in communication.

Dr. Stone, director of graduate studies, was not enthusiastic. The department required a minimum 3.0 undergraduate grade point average for full-status admission. In her experience, students with limited professional experience who also did not meet the G.P.A. requirements usually were not successful graduate students. However, Dr. Stone was persuaded by a strong letter of reference. She recommended Syl be admitted as a conditional student, requiring him to prove himself by achieving at least B grades in his first two graduate-level classes.

Syl continued to work in sales while attending school at night. He was not very interested in the material though, and disappointed that the fun he'd remembered as an undergrad wasn't the same at the grad level. He started to blow off classes when his boss asked him to work a conflicting schedule. He managed to get only a C in one class, and took an Incomplete in another, before leaving the academic world.

Prospective graduate students should have a clear commitment to further education, and a fairly specific goal. That goal may be "personal enrichment," or may be related to a career, but returning to graduate school because you can't think of anything better to do often sets you up for failure. If you also weren't the best student as an undergraduate, you usually need to convince a graduate school that something has changed since then—that you are now older and more mature or that you can offer several years of proven professional competence related to communication. Students who had academic problems as undergraduates will not find graduate school any easier.

Graduate-level classes and research, whether at the master's or Ph.D. level, should be intriguing, enlightening, exhilarating, even fun—that's what learning is all about. But students who misunderstand the process may make themselves miserable, and their advisors too, and often fail after committing hundreds of hours and as many dollars.

# Moving Along

## About Advisors

YOU HAD AN ACADEMIC ADVISOR AS AN UNDERGRADUATE, perhaps several. Perhaps you visited your advisor once a term, for real advice concerning classes and professional direction. Or perhaps you just came in for a perfunctory signature. Whatever your relationship may have been, you'll usually find the relationship with your graduate advisor to be much more significant.

Your graduate advisor's job is to guide you through the shoals of graduate study, from your first classes through your thesis or dissertation rewrites, if necessary. This includes not only helping you choose classwork, at the graduate level a much more flexible process than a mostly-prescribed undergraduate program, but also helping you choose a graduate committee and a research topic, and helping you prepare material to meet the minimum graduate level standard. It's an important and time-consuming role, which is why NDSU does not require a faculty member to accept a student's request to be his or her advisor.

Normally you'll start out being advised by the department's director of master's or Ph.D. studies. You may opt to stay with that person, but most students don't. Students commonly request an advisor after completing a few classes, after they become familiar with the faculty and the informal advice of other graduate students. Typically, students have secured an advisor by the time they've completed 12 graduate credits. It's smart to approach an advisor familiar with your area of interest. For instance, if you plan research in broadcast theory, it may be wise to approach a broadcast specialist as your advisor. Explain to that person what you are interested in. Ph.D. students often actually choose to apply to a particular university's graduate program based on access to a specialist

in their area of interest.

If your first choice of advisor declines to be your mentor, don't take it personally—usually that professor will already be overloaded with other advisees and graduate committees. Generally faculty members do not want to advise more than two or three graduate students at a time, so that they can devote enough attention to each student's work.

#### EXPECTATIONS AND MISUNDERSTANDINGS

##### **Six statements you'll *never* hear from a conscientious advisor:**

1. "Her attitude is just too professional for our program."

A 17- or 18-year-old freshman may be given some slack. A graduate student is expected to show a more professional attitude. While some advisors think it's okay for grad advisees to drop in, you should probably make an appointment first, and be prompt. A first-year undergraduate can walk in saying "My roommate goes, like, I oughta see my advisor guy, so here I am," and get by with it. (Well, perhaps.) As a grad student, you'll be expected to have your thoughts collected, to ask intelligent questions about your program and your work.

2. "I just love the opportunity to give my grad students weekly deadlines and exams."

You'll be expected to be independent, to be able to do work on your own without constant prodding and directing. As a burgeoning master of your discipline, you should be able to work on your own, without the tedious tyranny of undergraduate-style deadlines and exams.

3. "I wish he wouldn't bother people with his thesis drafts."

In addition to your advisor, members of your committee agree to be available for occasional consultation. You've selected your committee with guidance from your advisor, so they likely have areas of expertise your advisor doesn't, and can be helpful for specific research questions. Other graduate students too may have advice on class projects or research models. And don't forget to let your advisor know how things are going,

**Some recent communication  
master's thesis/paper titles:**

- "Demonizing Rum: Elizabeth Preston Anderson."
- "Wounded Knee: A Study of Newspaper Style and Coverage."
- "Diplomatic Communication Paradigms and the Balkan Conflict 1992-1995."
- "Inclusion/Exclusion Language: Influencing Public Opinion Using 'Us' Versus 'Them' Language...The NDSC Purge of 1937."
- "The Effects of Gender and Physical Attractiveness on Peer Critiques of a Persuasive Speech."
- "The Problems and Advantages of Being a Female Teacher Contract Negotiator in Class A Public School Districts in North Dakota."
- "Community Pluralism and Local News Policies for Covering Ethnic and Minority Groups."
- "Stress and the Health Chemotherapy Care Professional: Coping Through Communication."
- "Gender Roles and Relationships in the Neighborhood of Make-Believe."
- 

to offer a chapter draft now and then for review. You'll save yourself woe by soliciting advice early and often, before you're facing a major rewrite of the entire draft.

4. "My advisees pay too much attention to my advice."

If you're getting bogged down, let your advisor know. Learning takes place most often in dialogue, not in isolated garrets. Talk to your advisor, in addition to giving him or her drafts of your work. And listen to what he or she says. That's why they're called advisors. Your faculty mentor usually knows what you need to do to get your degree, and if you balk at suggestions, it hurts your relationship and may delay your degree. Keep in mind that at this point you are writing for four people: your advisor and your committee. Your advisor has been through this already. Why should you know more?

5. “I just detest receiving these polished, carefully-edited drafts.”

Your advisor is not a rewrite hack, available on demand to turn sloppy slush into promising prose. Do the best you can to offer clean, proofread work showing the best thought and effort you’re capable of.

6. “It’s really a pain that she’s so enthusiastic about her subject.”

Most advisors dread seeing certain students, graduates and even undergraduates who traipse in as if school is the worst of all possible worlds outside the coal pits. If you can’t be excited about your own work, how can you expect your advisor to be? Education might be challenging, might be taxing, might even be tedious sometimes—but mostly it’s supposed to be fun and stimulating.

**Four statements you’ll *never* hear from a smart graduate student:**

1. “I just love the way my free-spirited advisor skips appointments and slams my work.”

If you make an appointment, your advisor should be there, on time, to see you. Meetings, conferences, research are seldom excuses for neglecting to keep appointments with advisees. Your advisor ought to come prepared, having read your work, and having both praise and constructive criticism. Demeaning, vicious bashing of student work is inexcusable, but the advisor who offers nothing but praise really isn’t being helpful, either. Your advisor should know the standards expected of graduate students in your department.

2. “Isn’t it a fun challenge trying to squeeze time out of an advisor’s schedule?”

You have the right to advice from your advisor at reasonably frequent intervals. Once a month is hardly too often. Most advisors don’t mind if you call them at home once in a while. The advisor who is continually “too busy” to meet advisees should be reported to the department chair.

3. “What I’m looking for is a committee of real perfectionists.”

At NDSU, your advisor must approve your prospectus and your thesis before you can submit it to your committee. Your advisor is responsible for assuring that your work meets a reasonable graduate-level standard. A thesis or project at the master's level is a research exercise—a piece of writing designed to demonstrate that you are capable of research at an advanced level. It also may be a piece of original work reaching publishable standard. Or it may not be, but publication is not the point of a master's thesis. (It's more likely to be the eventual goal of a Ph.D. dissertation.) At this point, if the work satisfies the standard of the research exercise, it should satisfy a committee.

4. "I'd like an advisor who keeps his mouth shut so I can make my own case."

Instructors, department chairs, committee members, graduate school administrators are usually fair and reasonable. Sometimes they aren't. Your advisor does not have to help you during your prospectus presentation or thesis defense—that's your job. But if it's clear that a committee member is belittling you personally or undermining the entire basis of your work, you should expect the person who advises you to help out. Similarly, if graduate administrators are making unreasonable demands, your advisor will have a lot more influence than you will. He or she should use it.

#### **YOUR COMMITTEE**

At NDSU most graduate committees consist of your advisor, two professors from your department, and one from another department, for balance and perspective. You choose your departmental committee members yourself, the same way you choose your advisor. You ask them, usually based on your advisor's suggestions. Your external committee member is chosen by the graduate school office, but usually it honors a request for a professor who you think is particularly interested in your topic.

**Three statements you'll *never* hear from a good graduate committee member:**

1. "Her approach is just too professional for my tastes."

If you need help from a committee member, make and keep appointments. Drafts of written work should be word processed and legible, with a minimum of grammar errors.

2. "He gives me drafts of his work way too far in advance."

Students are required to give drafts of a prospectus or thesis to their committee members at least a week in advance, but it's not a bad idea to give them 10 days or, better yet, two weeks.

3. "I wish graduate students wouldn't bug me for advice."

If your advisor tells you to ask a committee member about your work, do it. Committee members appreciate the opportunity to help you out before a formal committee meeting, so that your prospectus and thesis are as close as possible to acceptable standard. You save yourself headaches, delays, grumpy committee members and required rewrites by keeping in close touch not only with your advisor, but with your committee. You may even wish to schedule an extra committee meeting to discuss your progress and questions.

**Three statements you'll *never* hear a smart graduate student say about a committee:**

1. "It's so annoying the way they insist upon reading my work and offering advice."

Committee members should be reasonably available for meetings, and should come on time. They should have read your work before the meeting, and should be prepared to offer both written and oral comments and questions. This is not the time for committee members to squabble about pet peeves, parade their knowledge of jargon and arcane theory, or use a student as target for splenetic outbursts.

2. "It's really fun trying to guess what major changes they'll ask me

to make at the final defense meeting.”

Committee members who discover problems during a student’s prospectus meeting need to be clear and specific about changes they require. If a member feels strongly that a change is necessary before the research plan can be approved, he or she should ask to see another copy of the prospectus. It is unreasonable for committee members to expect students to make major new changes to a thesis if they said nothing about the matter during the prospectus meeting.

3. “Perfection in all things thesis—that’s my goal.”

**Learning takes place most often in dialogue, not in isolated garrets.**

Like an advisor, a committee member needs to remember that a thesis or dissertation is first a research exercise. The standard must be the ability of the student to do graduate-level research, and while the final work may still show a few minor weaknesses, if the overall standard is met, the work should be approved. Graduate students should note that the vote of the committee need not be unanimous for thesis approval. One dissenting vote is allowed.

**THOSE HAPPY EX-GRAD STUDENTS. OR NOT.**

Many happy graduate students have turned into angry alumni through their experiences writing a thesis. Sometimes anger is justified, but often, too, it is evidence of misunderstanding between student, committee and graduate school.

**Six ways to leave graduate school with memories of misery:**

1. Expect immediate and unconditional approval of your thesis. Usually, this doesn’t happen. Instead, the committee may
  - a. approve your oral defense and your written work, but ask for minor changes in the writing, usually a few corrections in calculations or grammar, or minor additions to background literature. Your committee will rely on your advisor to approve the changes without their seeing the work again.

b. approve your oral defense, but ask for more substantial changes in your written work. This shouldn't happen if you've kept your committee informed of your progress, but it still happens more often than you'd imagine. Usually, you'll have to resubmit the draft for committee approval, but if you pass the oral defense you can still go through a graduation ceremony while you make your changes.

It may take some months to change your work to satisfy your committee members, so it's best to get started as soon as you can. If you take a job, move, and see your research fade into a dimmer and dimmer memory, you run the risk of letting the rewrite become an insurmountable obstacle. Wouldn't it be a shame to spend another half century trodding this world knowing you had a master's or Ph.D. degree in the bag—but let it slip away at the rewrite stage? Almost might count in horseshoe, but not in graduate school, no matter what the "ABD's" (All But Dissertation) would have you believe.

c. reject your oral defense and your thesis. This is uncommon, but it happens. Keep in mind you're being judged on your ability to do work at the graduate level of competence—orally as well as on paper. If you fail your orals, you will usually be required to read more widely in the field and make necessary changes to your written work before re-applying for an oral exam. You need to wait at least a month before trying again, with the approval of the committee.

d. fail your oral defense and thesis a second time, in which case you won't be permitted to try again. This is disaster scenario. It seldom occurs, but when it does, it should be pointed out that either your advisor clearly had little understanding of the academic requirements of graduate degree level work, or that your advisor was unable to help you bring your work up to acceptable standard, but permitted you to "take your lumps" in committee. Either way, frequent contact with committee members and careful rewrites should keep the unthinkable, unthinkable.

2. Rely on your advisor for accuracy of your research, tables, statistics, and arrangement of material.

While your advisor certainly will counsel you on all these areas, at

## How to Pay for Graduate Study

There's no denying that graduate school is expensive. Resident tuition per semester credit hovers at \$125, and it's unlikely to go down. The department normally calculates a "full load" of credits for graduate students at six to nine a semester, expecting most students will finish in about four or six semesters. This means a master's degree will cost you more than \$3,750, and a Ph.D. even more, not including books, room, food, maid service and other expenses.

Graduate students have an advantage over undergraduates, however: because they already have earned one degree, and often have teaching or professional experience, they may be qualified to teach undergraduates at beginning and intermediate levels. For this the department will pay.

About one fourth of the communication department's full-time master's degree students support their study with graduate teaching assistantships and fellowships. These cover tuition plus a yearly stipend of about \$7,000 in return for teaching two or three classes a semester. Speech communication students teach beginning speech classes, mass communication students teach beginning writing classes, and Ph.D. students teach upper-level undergraduate classes. (As of 2001, these departmental awards were normally not available to first-year overseas students.)

Teaching assistantships and fellowships are competitive. If you're interested, you need to apply to the department's coordinator of teaching assistants by early February before the next academic year.

Also available to graduate students are assistantships in the university's Sports Information Office, University Relations Office, Student Affairs Office, or Agricultural Communication Office. In addition, the new President's Office Ph.D. fellowship program offers \$16,000 a year plus tuition waiver, renewable up to four years. Deadlines vary. Interested students should check with these offices, or directly with the graduate school office. Of course, graduate students may also apply for government loan and grant programs.

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the end of the day you are responsible for your work. Check and re-check your calculations and facts; buy a copy of the graduate school's *Guidelines for the Preparation of Disquisitions* and carefully follow its format examples.

3. Rely on your advisor and your computer's spill chucker (as we did here) for proofreading.

Surely your advisor and committee will catch some things, but responsibility for final proofreading rests with the graduate school, and its own proofreaders. The more carefully you proofread your work, the less you'll have to change later. It's a good idea to have other graduate students proofread your work, or contact the university's Center for Writers for help.

4. Rush through the process.

You've got a job, you've got to move, your spouse is fed up with late nights, your employer has offered you a promotion.... We sympathize with the inevitable personal demands that can affect your graduate studies, but your advisor, your committee and the graduate school staff have busy lives too. Expecting your committee to approve your thesis immediately, and sending your work through the graduate school proofreader before your committee has given its okay, are good ways to annoy key people on whose approval your degree rests. Try to be patient. Do not submit sloppy drafts. Do your work by correspondence if necessary. It is not unusual for you to spend six months to a year revising your work before final committee acceptance. Unfortunate as it is, the bureaucratic processes of graduate study take time.

5. Refuse to make changes to your work, get fed up.

It's easy to do—you pour sweat and swearing into perhaps the largest piece of work you've ever written, and your advisor, committee members or proofreaders continue to pick away page by page. Refusing to make suggested changes, arguing, appealing to higher authorities are not

## Presenting and Publishing

You've got a great term paper, a promising thesis. Don't just throw it in the sock drawer. Present! Publish! Your advisor will help you navigate the shoals of academic scholarship presentation, but here are some guidelines to get you started.

Normally you have the option of presenting your work to a regional or national conference of your peers, in our case either in mass communication or speech communication. You'll be asked to submit several copies of your work for "blind review." This means several recognized scholars in your field will evaluate your work for quality and originality, but because your name is only on the title page, referees won't know whom they're evaluating. This peer review process is designed to give you and an audience an objective appraisal of your work. That's what makes the peer review process so valuable—and such an impressive line on your résumé or vita.

The same process is used to review articles submitted to refereed journals. In both cases, even if your work isn't accepted, referees will likely make detailed comments on how you can improve. Even well-known scholars are used to revising and resubmitting their work.

The department tries to pay at least part of student expenses to



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good ways to facilitate the process, however. Generally speaking, unless you feel suggestions are truly unjust, your best response is to *make the changes and return the draft as soon as possible*, even if it's not exactly the way you would have written it. Remember: you can turn your work into an article, a paper, even an Internet web page if you want—AFTER you get the degree.

### 6. Let it slide.

You finished all your course work, you have your thesis topic and an approved prospectus. Now all you have to do is get to work. Well, don't relax now. Get going! The longer you wait, the harder it gets as the ideas that sparked your creativity in classes fade into background knowledge.

present papers at conferences. Here is a list of some conferences offering graduate students opportunities to submit their work:

- National Communication Association national conference. Deadline February 1.
- Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication national convention. Deadline April 1.
- Central States Communication Association regional conference. Deadline September 1.
- AEJMC regional conferences. Deadlines vary.
- American Journalism Historians Association national conference. Deadline May 1.
- North Dakota Speech and Theatre Association state convention. Deadline May 1.
- Red River Student Communication Conference. Our own conference, held in April. Deadline is flexible, and participation is expected!

To submit to journals, try reading a number in your area to see if your work fits, then consult guidelines for submission, which usually appear somewhere in the journal. Students may also consult *The Iowa Guide* for a long list of mass communication-related journals. Regional journals particularly encourage student submissions, and it's a great way to learn the process and launch your reputation for good scholarship. Our state journal is the annual *North Dakota Journal of Speech and Theatre*. Despite its title, journal editors welcome research articles and notes touching all kinds of communication areas, including mass communication and communication history. This is a refereed publication, not a popular magazine, so you can rely on its holding high standards for submitted work. Editor (2001) is Ross Collins, the department's director of master's degree studies.

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Perhaps procrastination is responsible for more failed graduate degrees than any other single reason. Students used to the assigned projects and firm deadlines of classes are, for perhaps the first time in their lives, asked to do a substantial piece of work, by themselves, with no particular

deadline looming. The rules say you have to complete a master's degree in seven years, and a Ph.D. in ten years, or begin classes all over again. Don't be the person at the cocktail party who says, "I almost finished a graduate degree once."

## **Graduate communication study at NDSU: a snapshot**

### **Faculty**

Number of teaching graduate faculty (spring 2001): 12.  
Percent with Ph.D.s: 100.

### **Master's applicants (1998-99)**

Number of applicants: 47.  
Applicants accepted (full status): 45 percent.

### **Master's Enrollment (1999)**

Enrolled master's students: 42.  
Percent women/men: 84/16.  
Percent minorities: 5.

### **Degrees (1998-99)**

Number of communication master's degrees conferred: 16.  
Percentage M.A./M.S.: about 66/34.  
Percentage who chose the thesis/project options: about 50/50.  
Percentage of degrees in speech comm/mass comm: about 66/34.

**Ph.D. statistics** (new program fall 2000): data not yet available.

### **Contacts**

Director of Master's/Ph.D. Studies or Chair:  
Department of Communication, Box 5075, North Dakota State University, Fargo, ND 58105-5075.  
Tel: (701) 231-7705.  
FAX: (701) 231-7784.  
Walk-in: 321 Minard Hall.  
E-mail, master's: <Ross\_Collins@ndsu.nodak.edu>.  
Ph.D: <Judy\_Pearson@ndsu.nodak.edu>. Chair: <Paul\_Nelson\_1@ndsu.nodak.edu>.  
Department Web page: <www.ndsu.nodak.edu>. In Search Box type "Communication."

### **NDSU Graduate Studies Office:**

Box 5790, North Dakota State University, Fargo, ND 58105-5790.  
Tel: (701) 231-7033.  
Web page: <www.ndsu.nodak.edu/gradschool/>.  
Walk-in: 201 Old Main.

# Appendix One

## **Fifteen Steps to Completing a Disquisition in the Department of Communication, North Dakota State University**

(Graduate studies director for the master's program: Ross  
Collins, Minard 321, 231-7295;  
e-mail: <Ross\_Collins@ndsu.nodak.edu>)

1. Check with the NDSU graduate school (Old Main 201; tel. 231-7033) to make sure you have been formally accepted into the graduate program.

2. Select an advisor or have one appointed to you by the director of master's degree or Ph.d. degree studies in communication. Faculty members are not required to honor a request to serve as a student's advisor.

3. Select your committee members. Work with your advisor to select faculty best able to offer you help in your interest area. The committee is composed of your advisor, two communication faculty holding doctoral degrees, and a graduate faculty member from outside the communication department. The outside member is appointed by the graduate school, but you may request a specific individual from another department. Your advisor will send a memorandum with your request to the graduate school.

4. File a plan-of-study form with the graduate school. The program of study includes a list of all courses you have taken and intend to complete for your degree. This form must be signed by you, your advisor, all

committee members *except the outside member*, the chair of the communication department, the dean of the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, and the dean of the graduate school. Your outside committee member cannot sign the program of study form until he or she is appointed by the dean of the graduate school. This happens only after your program of study is approved. Until then, the graduate appointee section is left blank.

5. Write your prospectus, and submit it to your advisor for approval. Schedule a prospectus meeting with your committee. Meet with your committee and present your prospectus. Usually, your committee will not allow you to defend your disquisition in the same semester that you present your prospectus. Ph.D. students may also need to schedule comprehensive exams; check with your advisor.

6. Write your disquisition under the close supervision of your advisor. Note that you cannot defend your disquisition until you have your advisor's approval. The department recommends that you do not rush through your project for extrinsic reasons such as job interviews or promotions.

7. Your advisor may wish to have you meet with a proofreader approved by the graduate school before or after the defense of your disquisition.

8. Schedule your disquisition defense with the graduate school. To do so, you will need to obtain a "Request to Schedule Examination" form from the graduate school. Typically, the defense must be scheduled at least two weeks before commencement if you wish to participate in graduate ceremonies. You cannot officially schedule your defense unless you are given approval from the Graduate School and the Registrar.

9. When your final defense is officially scheduled, you will receive two forms from the graduate school. The first is entitled "Report of Final

## Serve yourself

We know you have to go...but we don't want to see you at the soup kitchens. Yes, communication jobs are in demand, but with a graduate degree from NDSU and a good résumé or vita (C.V.), you should be plenty competitive. You can teach with a master's degree at a community college or smaller university, and many larger universities offer non-tenured positions as lecturers or instructors. To become a tenured faculty member at most university communication departments nowadays, however, you need a Ph.D., also a valuable degree for many high-level positions in industry.

A *résumé* normally is offered by a job candidate in the world of business. A *vita* or *C.V.* (short for the Latin *Curriculum Vita* or *Vita*), on the other hand, in the United States is normally offered by a candidate for a position in higher education. The *vita* set-up is a little different, based on the categories of teaching, scholarship and service. Because you're applying for an education-related position, you begin your *vita* with education, such as:

- Ph.D. Where earned, when completed (A.B.D., that is, "All But Dissertation," if you haven't finished it), areas of emphasis, dissertation title, advisor.
- M.A. or M.S. Possibly thesis title and advisor, if recent.




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Examination." The second is the official title page of your thesis. It includes spaces for the signatures of your committee members and your department chair.

10. Defend your disquisition.

11. When your committee passes your disquisition, they will sign the "Report of Final Examination" form. Take this form to the graduate school immediately following your defense. If you have been asked to

- B.A. or B.S. Include undergraduate grade point average if it was above about 3.3.
- Certifications, if applicable.

Next you emphasize your teaching experience, then professional experience, then research, including all refereed publications and presentations, work in progress, grant submissions, and non-refereed publications. Then list honors and awards, professional society memberships, and service, including campus organizations, service to the communication profession, and to the community. A vita commonly runs to several pages, while a résumé is usually kept to about two.

Résumé organization may vary, of course, depending on your employment goal. You can buy a variety of résumé-writing books at NDSU's Varsity Mart or another bookstore.

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make changes in the disquisition, committee members will sometimes wait to sign the official title page until they can review the changes. It is also possible that the committee will instead ask the advisor to see that all changes are made. If so, they may sign the official title page at the defense.

12. Work with your advisor to make all changes recommended by your committee. Once your advisor has approved your disquisition and the committee has signed the official title page, the communication department chair must approve your disquisition, signing a line on the official title page. **YOU MUST** make the changes requested by your committee before submitting your work to the graduate school.

13. Take one copy of your disquisition with all signatures on the official title page to the graduate school. This copy should be free of any format or grammatical problems. You may wish to have a proofreader who has been approved the graduate school review your disquisition

*before* you deliver a copy to the graduate school. You must go to a proof-reader if your advisor insists. You are responsible for the proofreading cost.

14. The graduate school will review your disquisition. If reviewers find any problems, they will return the manuscript to your advisor with a letter explaining the problems. A copy of the letter will also be sent to the communication department chair and to the college dean. You or your advisor may also be asked to discuss the problems with the dean of the graduate school.

15. Once the graduate school approves your disquisition, you will be asked to make the required number of final copies on an approved paper stock. You will also be charged a binding fee. Specific physical requirements are described in the university's *Guidelines for Disquisitions* handbook. After the graduate school approves these copies, you may graduate. Note: you must be enrolled for at least one graduate credit during the semester in which your disquisition receives final approval.



# Appendix Two

## **Comprehensive study (non-thesis) options in communication for master's degree candidates**

### **General comments**

Students pursuing a Master of Arts or Science degree in communication may choose to complete a traditional thesis, or may choose to complete a creative or applied project demonstrating depth of knowledge and advanced professional-level skills in a chosen area. In deciding to pursue the non-thesis option, however, students must understand that the department does not offer a true “applied” master’s degree, and in many cases cannot adequately advise students who choose ambitious projects. As well, students who may pursue further graduate education at the Ph.D. level are advised to choose the traditional thesis option. Some university Ph.D. programs require a master’s-level thesis for acceptance, and skills gained through the research are helpful for advanced graduate study.

Students who wish to complete an master’s degree for career enhancement or personal goals occasionally may find a non-thesis option more suitable, however. About half the department’s graduate students choose this option, especially teachers and other working professionals who find a project allows them to incorporate theory more directly into their work settings. This guide will help them choose appropriate projects based on departmental resources.

Note: students will be awarded three credits for the non-thesis option, compared with six credits awarded for a thesis. The means students who choose not to complete a thesis must complete one more three-credit class to meet the 30 credits of graduate work required for a master’s degree.

### **Procedures and Format**

While many prescriptions and standards may offer a good basis for an applied or creative project, the department recommends the three general steps below, completed under direction of an advisor.

1. Goal-setting. Setting goals helps students to integrate their work into broader contexts of learning. Goals students set for a project involve the application of a communication theory or concept into an organizational environment in hopes of either improving communication or providing a better understanding of a communication difficulty. Goals need to be grounded in theory and appropriate for the selected situation.

2. Reading the Environment. Students need to distance themselves from their own experience to better understand the situation as a whole. Student observations are supplemented by information collected from customers or other members of an organization.

3. Reflecting. Students should be able to articulate the knowledge and skills they have obtained, and how they can apply it to other contexts. Students need also to offer suggestions for further applications regarding the theories or concepts and situations they evaluate.

### **Preparation**

In most areas, candidates generally can expect preparation of a creative or applied project of sufficient depth to entail four to six months of work. In all cases, a written component is required, in the form of an essay or paper. A formal oral discussion or defense of the project is also normally required.

Candidates are advised to begin by ascertaining if they or the department have the technical resources and faculty available to complete specialized projects. No allowance for inferior quality work can be made for students who lack equipment capable of meeting their goals, and specialized projects beyond the realm of study offered through the department cannot be accommodated. These specialized areas include advertising, film, and publication design.

Below are possible areas in which communication students may wish

to fashion a creative project. Other specialties matching student interests may be proposed.

- I. Photography
- II. Writing
- III. Corporate Communication
- IV. Research/theory/history
- V. Communication management
- VI. Law
- VII. Reviewable essay

#### I. Photography

A candidate interested in photography would likely begin by choosing an area of specialty, as the field is too vast for a single practitioner to become proficient in more than a few specialties. Specialties may include photojournalism, fine art, advertising, documentary, or another area.

The candidate needs to begin by demonstrating understanding of the history and development of the field. This would likely be done through preparation of a research paper of about seven to ten pages, relying on at least five sources.

Next the candidate must describe, in written form, what he or she proposes to prepare. This description of goals and objectives should be fairly detailed, with the understanding that creative work may vary as the creator gains insight and understanding of the subject.

#### II. Writing

Writers may wish to reconsider the thesis option, as this is usually the best choice for presentation of non-fiction material in graduate school. If, however, the candidate is still interested in a creative option in this area, required is a substantial body of non-fiction work, including several in-depth interpretive/investigative pieces, or one interpretive/investigative piece of exceptional depth and breadth. Such a piece would likely take several months to research and prepare.

Writing candidates are required to submit at least some of the material for publication in established local or national outlets for review

by peers, and would most likely be expected to have at least some of the material accepted.

III. Corporate Communication

Candidates choosing a creative option may wish to do a thesis-based case study. This creative option would most likely require a comprehensive preparation of a communications campaign for a company or institution. Work would include a client proposal, market research component, and comprehensive preparation of written material at a professional level. The plan would be presented for implementation by the client.

IV. Research/theory/history

In nearly all cases, a thesis option is the most likely choice for candidates interested in these and related areas of mass communication. Marketing research for advertising or public relations, however, may be undertaken if the candidate has sufficient background (usually at least an undergraduate minor in marketing, or equivalent professional experience). Such marketing proposals would be examined case by case.

V. Communication management

Candidates would rely on understanding of business management and corporate communication to fashion an individualized project based on personal goals and departmental resources.

VI. Law

Candidates interested in issues of mass communication law will normally choose the thesis option. However, a candidate who holds a law degree interested in the creative option may wish to review cases of mass communication law and prepare a defense or argument based on accepted standards of the legal profession. The material would be reviewed by peers with expertise in communication law.

VII. Reviewable essay

This option affords students the opportunity to select a single question or hypothesis and explore it in a focused (20 to 30 pages)

### **Where are they now? Some recent NDSU communication master's degree graduates**

- Technical writer, 3M.
- Instructor, University of Mary.
- Instructor, North Dakota State College of Science.
- Ph.D. students, University of Minnesota.
- Admissions counselor, Rasmussen College, Minneapolis.
- Instructors, NDSU communication department.
- Director, NDSU university relations office.
- Instructor, Minot State University.
- Secondary education teachers (numerous schools).
- Ph.D. student, University of Nebraska.
- Radio news director, KDSU.
- Instructor, Concordia College.
- Assistant Professor, University of Arkansas.
- Director of Communication, Bismarck Parks and Recreation.
- Lecturer, Minot State University.
- Training and development, Lucent Technology.
- Marketing, Kellogg, Inc.
- Director, Project Success, NDSU.
- Associate Director of Admissions, NDSU.
- Director of Forensics and Lecturer, McNeese State University, Louisiana.
- Associate Director of Student Life, Pittsburg (KS) State University.
- Union representative, North Dakota Public Employees Association.

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manuscript format. The ultimate goal is to allow students to generate essays worthy of review in appropriate scholarly journals. To meet graduate school demands for the non-thesis option, the essay needs to be written at a level high enough to warrant journal review, and needs to include a) a researchable question/hypothesis; b) relevant literature review; c) appropriate scholarly method applied to a database.



# Appendix Three

## **Formal admissions requirements for graduate school in the department of communication: master's level**

Communication master's degree programs are open to students holding a baccalaureate degree from universities and colleges of recognized standing. To be admitted with full status to the program, the applicant must:

1. Have adequate study in mass communication or speech communication and show potential to undertake advanced study and research as evidenced by academic performance and experience. For graduate study in speech communication, the applicant should have completed study in persuasion or rhetoric, small group theory or interpersonal communication theory, and a performance-based study. The applicant for graduate study in mass communication should offer course work in journalism, media production, and mass media history and theory as minimum background.

2. At the baccalaureate level, must have earned a cumulative grade point average of at least 3.0 or equivalent. However, the department no longer requires master's degree applicants to complete the Graduate Record Examination.

Students who fail to meet these requirements for full admission or have deficiencies in background preparation but demonstrate potential for successful graduate study may be admitted under a provisional or conditional status. In general, evidence must be offered that demonstrates

an applicant's potential is not reflected by the academic record. After meeting the graduate school standards, the students may request a change to full graduate standing. The student may not earn more than 12 semester hours of graduate credit in a provisional or conditional status. The request for change of status must be submitted to the dean of the graduate school by the major advisor and approved by the department chair.

Applications must be submitted to the Graduate School before February 1 of the upcoming academic year for those interested in a teaching assistantship or fellowship. Otherwise, applications will be considered at any time.

Official transcripts (transcripts having an appropriate seal or stamp) of all previous undergraduate and graduate records must be submitted with the application. When a transcript is submitted in advance of the completion of undergraduate or graduate studies, an updated transcript showing all course credits and grades must be provided prior to the initial registration at NDSU.

Three letters of recommendation are required before action is taken on any application. Reference report forms and general applications are available from the graduate school or in the university's *Graduate Bulletin*.

The TOEFL examination is required of international applicants. The department of communication requires that a score of 600 or greater be achieved. The Graduate Record Examination (General and Subject Tests) is also required of international students.

# Appendix Four

## **A Ph.D. in Communication at NDSU**

- **Introduction**
- **Admission**
- **Requirements**
- **Sample schedule**
- **Contacts**
- **Presidential fellowship program**

### **Introduction**

The doctoral program in communication at North Dakota State University is unique. Students are encouraged to engage in action-oriented research: research that seeks to solve real-world problems. While some programs produce dissertations and research that are read by few and used by no one, our program seeks to make a difference in the world. Our research goes beyond data analysis to create concrete programs of action that are implemented, evaluated, and modified, if necessary.

Although the program allows students to prepare for traditional careers in the professorate, many students are seeking advancement in careers in business, consulting, or other communication-related professions. The program is based on theory and research with a practical, applied, action-oriented goal. Doctoral students strive to understand issues, solve problems, and create programs that can improve organizational, educational, interpersonal, and intercultural settings and situations.

The program seeks two groups of students: Successful mid-career professionals who wish to advance or change focus, and young scholars with exceptional undergraduate records and accomplishments. The

braiding of these two groups creates a classroom atmosphere that is dynamic and allows practical wisdom to be combined with current research and theory. The doctoral program includes a wide variety of students including those who are place-bound in the Fargo-Moorhead area and those who have moved from California, New York, and Washington State, among other places, for the purpose of pursuing this Ph.D. program.

Doctoral-seeking students in the program come from a variety of academic backgrounds and are afforded great flexibility in course delivery and course content. Acceptance into the program is competitive, but students may enroll in up to twelve credit hours before they complete an application for the program. Sixty credit hours beyond the master's degree are required, with thirty credit hours focused on the content of the discipline, and thirty credit hours focused on research. Doctoral students must complete a dissertation acceptable to their advisor and their committee.

The strong emphasis on research in the program; the faculty's view of the centrality of teaching; the faculty's involvement in national, regional, and state associations; the faculty's professional experience in journalism, broadcasting and public relations; and the close working relationship with the doctoral advisor and other faculty members allows a number of positive outcomes. First, students generally have two to three publications and multiple convention presentations before graduation. Second, students who are pursuing careers in the professorate have a keen understanding of teaching and learning. Third, students who are interested in academic associations are encouraged to serve in multiple roles within them. Fourth, students interested in mass communication gain both theoretical and practical information. Finally, students understand the importance of community and university service.

#### **Admission to the program**

A complete application includes the following materials required by the graduate school:

- (1) application;
- (2) reasons for graduate study statement;
- (3) application fee;
- (4) transcripts;
- (5) letters of recommendation.

The department of communication requires, in addition,

(1) a vita or résumé which clearly identifies your current position, including your responsibilities, span of authority, and sphere of influence; your professional publications and papers, your service and professional activity; and your teaching and training experiences.

(2) a professional writing sample, which could be a master's thesis, a final paper for a course, a conference paper, a briefing paper or a news article.

(3) Graduate Record Exam (GRE) scores.

Deadlines for the following academic terms are:

Fall Term 2001 deadline: February 1, 2001.

Spring Term 2002 deadline: July 1, 2001.

### **Degree requirements**

The Ph.D. requires at least 60 semester hours beyond the master's degree. The 60 or more hours must be in a planned course of study approved and overseen by the student's advisor and advisory committee. The student's planned program will often contain more than the minimum 60 hours. Students with a master's degree in another discipline may be required to complete additional graduate course work in specific areas of communication deemed necessary by the student's advisor and advisory committee. Graduate work taken beyond the master's degree may be judged applicable by the advisory committee, but post-master's graduate credits beyond nine semester hours will not count toward the 60-hour minimum required for the Ph.D.

To complete the program, students must demonstrate:

a thorough grasp of perspectives on the nature of communication as an applied science and the process of theory construction and testing;

a broad knowledge of theories and research in various applied communication contexts; in-depth knowledge of the communication context chosen as the student's area of specialization;  
of Communication, OR Comm 637, Theories of Mass Communication

c. Comm 705, Advanced Theories of Communication

d. Comm 796, Action Oriented Research for Communication Professionals

(Note: Persons with a communication master's degree may be exempt from one, or more, of these core courses.)

2. Major Concentration: Minimum of 20 credit hours of courses including a major concentration. (Generally, the core courses will not comprise a portion of the concentration.)

a. Minimum of 15 credit hours in the departmental 700-789 courses.

b. Minimum of 6 credit hours at the 700-789 level in a cognate area outside the department that represents a coherent unit of study (such as education, sociology, psychology, or business)

B. 30 credit hours in research and research courses, to include

1. Research Courses

a. Minimum of 15 total credit hours of research courses.

b. Of these, a minimum of 12 credit hours of didactic research courses (6 credit hours may be transferred from the master's degree)

c. A maximum of 9 credit hours of independent study conducting research

2. Dissertation Credit Hours

a. Minimum of 15 credit hours of dissertation research

b. No maximum number of dissertation credit hours

A sample curriculum might include some of the following courses:

**Year 1**

*Fall*

Intro to Graduate Studies/Research Methods in Communication  
Advanced Intercultural Communication  
Human Communication Theory OR Mass Communication Theory  
Introduction to Action-Oriented Research  
Communication and Change

*Spring*

Argument  
Communication ethics  
Rhetorical Criticism  
Crisis Communication  
Issues Management

**Year 2**

*Fall*

Organizational Communication I  
Advanced Interpersonal Communication  
Communication Law  
Advanced Communication Theory  
Advanced Qualitative Methods  
Independent Research

*Spring*

Issues in Mass Communication  
Small Group Communication  
Persuasion  
Organizational Communication II  
Advanced Quantitative Methods  
Independent Research

**Year 3**

*Fall*

Independent Research  
Dissertation

*Spring*

Independent Research

Dissertation

**How long will it take?**

To complete the Ph. D. program in three years, students need to complete 20 credit hours per year. To complete in two years, students need to complete 30 credit hours per year. Students may take fewer credit hours per year, which will extend their doctoral study to four years or more.

**Termination Policy**

A review committee constituted from among the department's graduate faculty will review the progress of each student in the Ph.D. program as they reach certain credit-completion benchmarks, and annually. The initial review will occur after completion of nine credit hours, followed by subsequent reviews at the end of March of each academic year. The committee may recommend to the department's graduate faculty the termination of any student's program. The graduate faculty may then recommend termination to the graduate school. Such recommendation will be made only after consultation with the student's major advisor and advisory committee, and follow only if ratified by a two-thirds vote of the graduate faculty.

**Contacts**

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### **The Presidential Doctoral Graduate Fellowship Program**

North Dakota State University has established one of the nation's most competitive Ph.D. fellowship programs to attract high-quality students to the university's doctoral programs.

#### **Purpose**

To recruit high-quality graduate students into doctoral programs with the goal of increasing the number of Ph.D. degrees awarded at NDSU. The fellow will not be required to teach.

#### **Awards**

\$16,000 a year plus tuition waiver; may be held for up to four years.

#### **Who's eligible**

Students must hold a baccalaureate degree with an overall cumulative Grade Point Average of 3.0 or better, and a master's degree with an overall GPA of 3.25, or better. The Graduate Record Exam (GRE) is required; students must achieve a composite score (V/Q/A) of 1600 or better. Overseas students are eligible. To meet a goal of diverse applicants, precedence will be given to students not currently or previously enrolled at NDSU. Fellows must not hold university employment, and must maintain a 3.25 or better cumulative GPA.

#### **How to apply**

Applications are made by the program director on behalf of a student. Contact Judy Pearson, director of graduate studies for the communication Ph.D. program, at the address above.

Whether we are young or old,  
Our destiny, our being's heart and home  
Is with infinitude, and only there,  
With hope it is, hope that can never die,  
Effort and expectation, and desire,  
And something evermore about to be.

— William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*