Our Department Mission Statement
We teach and research communication to connect people, create change, and work toward a just world.

Philosophy of Scholarship
We believe that communication is formative and foundational to human identities, relationships, and communities--and that ethical and strategically effective communication can be the means of critiquing, constructing, and transforming identities, relationships, and communities.
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Introduction

Welcome to the Master of Arts program in Communication Studies. The Graduate Faculty offers this handbook in the hope it will help guide you toward a successful experience in the program. Please refer to the Handbook and the Graduate School Catalog throughout your time with us and feel free to ask about any of the information in it with the Director of Graduate Study and any other member of the graduate faculty (see p. 21 for list of faculty).

Mission

The Master of Arts program in Communication Studies prepares students for scholarly or applied communication careers in the social, public, and private sectors, community college teaching, or advancement to a doctoral program. As they master the tools of scholarship, students acquire: 1) a deep, research-based, critical understanding of communication in relation to public and private contexts and issues, and 2) the ability to participate in and contribute to the communication discipline as scholars and practitioners.

Student Learning Objectives

- Demonstrate an advanced development of professional oral and writing abilities, including scholarly argument.
- Generate communication knowledge for and apply communication knowledge to local/global human interaction processes, problems, or issues.
- Conduct communication research that engages a substantial scholarly communication question or topic.

Department Philosophy of Scholarship

We believe that communication is formative and foundational to human identities, relationships, and communities—and that ethical and strategically effective communication can be the means of critiquing, constructing, and transforming identities, relationships, and communities.

We engage in communication scholarship in the form of research, teaching, and service that:

- Integrates dialogue and other approaches to communication as the foundation for scholarly inquiry and application to the world
- Cultivates diversity and respect for differences
- Promotes change that leads to more democratic, just, and peaceful relationships and communities
- Engages creative partnerships of faculty, students, and other stakeholders in addressing contemporary challenges and opportunities for improving communication
Scholarly Focus Areas
These beliefs and values are articulated in the following ongoing scholarly focus areas of the Department:

- **Public Voice**
  How can communication scholarship help us to understand and improve the quality of public discourse in the world around us?

- **Voices of Change, Diversity and Difference, and Conflict**
  How can communication scholarship help people to engage with diversity, differences, and divisions in ways that promote understanding and collaborative-democratic change?

- **Voices of Identity and Relationships**
  How can communication scholarship help us understand how people create and sustain desired identities and healthy relationships?

- **Voices of Discovery**
  How can communication scholarship help us understand how people learn to co-construct, share, and critique knowledge?
Profile of a Successful Graduate Student

Successful graduate students are intellectually curious, self-directed, and deeply committed to their development as masters of communication. They are open to lifelong learning to cultivate their effective and ethical voices in their public, professional, and personal communicative practices.

Professional Identity Development
A graduate degree is much more than a collection of courses and grades. Successful graduate students maintain a high degree of involvement in shaping a professional identity and core research interests. To facilitate this socialization into the discipline and the department, various events, colloquia, trainings, and educational sessions will be available for students to attend. The department STRONGLY ENCOURAGES all graduate students to attend these sessions. Specifically, we strongly recommend that all incoming students attend the general Graduate School orientation session as well as departmental orientation sessions before the fall semester begins. These sessions are in addition to any trainings required for teaching assistants.

Another aspect of professional socialization into the field of Communication involves attendance, when possible, at professional meetings and conferences. We encourage you to attend at least one conference during your studies and we encourage advanced students to submit research for presentation at the annual meetings of our professional associations. Some of these include:

National Communication Association
www.natcom.org
International Communication Association
www.icahdq.org
Southern States Communication Association
www.ssca.net
Central States Communication Association
www.csca-net.org
Eastern Communication Association
www.ecasite.org
Western States Communication Association
www.westcomm.org
Carolinas Communication Association
www.carolinascommunication.org

Intellectual Development
The Department offers almost all of its coursework in 3 semester hour seminars that meet one evening per week. In addition, throughout the academic year, lectures, colloquia, social, and research opportunities are available to enrich your graduate experience. We take as given that you will attend seminars prepared to participate meaningfully. We expect that you will attend a range of extracurricular events designed to cultivate your professional identity and membership in the department community.
Advising

Permanent Academic Advisor
In our program, the Director of Graduate Study serves as the permanent academic advisor to all graduate students. Students should plan to meet with the Director at least once each semester throughout the program to discuss coursework selection for the Plan of Study, professional development, progress toward a capstone project, and any problems or concerns.

Incoming Faculty Mentor
In addition to an advisor, all incoming students are paired with an incoming graduate faculty mentor, based on mutual research interests or more general academic interests. Mentors provide guidance into the conceptual underpinnings of research, suggested readings in areas of interest, and the potential to participate in ongoing faculty research projects and colloquia. When a student’s specific capstone focus takes shape, she/he should seek out a graduate faculty member, whose research background aligns with this focus, to direct the capstone project. This capstone director can be any graduate faculty member, including the incoming faculty mentor or academic advisor. For more on the Capstone, see pp. 17-23.

Graduate Student Buddy
Finally, all incoming graduate students are paired with a buddy, who is a continuing graduate student in our program. Buddies help new students acclimate to graduate student life at UNCG and ease their transition to a new town. They are a rich experiential resource for advice on how to become a successful and confident graduate student.

Please take advantage of our relatively small program to make good use of all of these resources to connect you to the program and its possibilities for you. In addition, faculty stand ready to guide you, and the Director of Graduate Study will advise you regularly on curricular and graduate school requirements (formally and informally), but the need to sustain a commitment to your development as a master of communication rests with you.
General Guidelines for Graduate Study

The UNCG Graduate School dictates a set of University-wide requirements for the completion of a master’s degree. Keep these basics in mind.

Progress through the program
Graduate students are admitted unconditionally or provisionally. Students admitted provisionally need to fulfill the requirements as laid out in their acceptance letters in order to remain in the program.

Full time status
At UNCG, graduate students are considered full-time students when enrolled for 9 semester hours per semester. Full time students in Communication Studies usually take no more than 9 hours per semester. Teaching Assistants, Research Assistants, and Graduate Assistants are required by the University to be full-time students and in satisfactory academic standing (minimum overall GPA of 3.0).

Full-time students can complete our program in two years. Students who work full-time, and take 3 to 6 hours per semester, will take longer to complete their degree.

Continuous enrollment
Once admitted to the program, graduate students must be continuously enrolled for two semesters per year and graduating students need to be enrolled in the semester they plan to graduate. Normally, this means enrollment in fall and spring semesters but can also include enrollment in fall or spring plus a summer session.

Leaves of absence
Graduate students who need to step out of the University for more than one semester should apply for a leave of absence to avoid the need to reapply for admission to our master’s program. If special circumstances necessitate a temporary leave, please contact the Director of Graduate Study to explore your options.

Time limits for completion of the program
The Graduate School has a limit of 5 years from the student’s date of matriculation to fulfill all the requirements of the MA degree. In other words, the 5-year time limit begins from the date of the first course carrying graduate degree credit listed on the student’s Plan of Study. This includes any transfer credits carrying graduate credit at UNCG.
Transfer credits
At the master’s level, credit may be given for graduate work at other accredited universities (including the Greater Greensboro Consortium and UNCG’s Division of Continual Learning). Some Graduate School restrictions apply as a way to ensure the intellectual integrity of our degree programs. These include the following:

- Transfer credit may not exceed one third of the number of hours required by a program
- Transfer credits used to complete the requirements for another degree cannot be applied
- Transfer work needs to be taken within the 5-year time limit for all coursework
- Students need to have earned a grade of B (3.0) or better on transfer credits, as documented on an official transcript from the accrediting institution
- Transfer credits must be necessary to meet specific degree requirements
- Coursework eligibility will be determined by the Director of Graduate Study and the Dean of the Graduate School
- Only hours, not grades, transfer

Please talk to the Director of Graduate Study if you want to consider transfer credit for graduate level coursework taken at another institution.

Checklist of Graduate School requirements for graduation

- A Plan of Study, submitted prior to the completion of 15 hours of coursework
- A final Plan of Study, if any changes have been made to the previous Plan, filed by the end of the first week of classes of the semester in which you plan to graduate
- Application for graduation and payment of graduation fee, also completed by the end of the first week of classes of the semester in which you plan to graduate
- Satisfactory completion of all course requirements for the degree
- A 3.0 overall average
- Satisfactory completion of the capstone experience
- Payment of all accounts

Please be aware that the Graduate School rarely accepts late applications to graduate. Be sure to pay attention to deadlines outlined in the University Academic Calendar for specific dates.

Graduate student governance
All departments are invited to nominate graduate student delegates to the University Graduate Student Association (GSA). The Association meets several times a year to discuss graduate program policies and student concerns. In recent years the Graduate School Dean, Dr. William Wiener, has worked closely with the GSA to develop policy and professional development relevant to UNCG graduate students.

The GSA also allocates funds to students to attend and participate in professional meetings. Students who want to apply for funding need to meet the periodic deadlines and should apply before applying to the Department.
Here is general information about the GSA, taken from their website:
“The Graduate Student Association is a student fee funded organization formed by students to promote the interests of the graduate student body at UNCG. We meet monthly during the fall and spring semesters in joint senate and executive board meetings to discuss issues relevant to the general membership. The association is student operated and governed. Throughout the year we award approximately $50,000 to support travel to conferences, assist with thesis and dissertation expense, and provide grants for local community-based research. We believe that it is our responsibility to act as good university citizens by informing ourselves about the actions of the university, the community, and the state, and to advocate for the interests of all UNCG graduate students in terms of employment, professional development, and school/life balance.”

For more information about GSA activities and professional development support, go to their website at: https://sites.google.com/a/uncg.edu/gsa/

If you would like to be nominated as a delegate, and are committed to attending the meetings on a regular basis, please see the Director of Graduate Study to discuss your interest.

Contact information
All graduate students have a UNCG email address, which is the address faculty use for paperless contact, both individually and collectively. In addition, students have a mailbox in the office at 103 Ferguson for hard copy communication. A graduate student bulletin board, opposite 103 Ferguson, features news about students, upcoming events, and other announcements.
Explanation of Graduate School Fees for Fall 2015

ASG Fee: $0.42
Supports UNCG’s participation in the UNC Association of Student Governments, which is a student-led organization committed to furthering educational opportunities and advocating for all students within the University of North Carolina system.

Athletic Fee: $298.75
Supports most costs of UNCG’s Division I intercollegiate athletics program including the maintenance of athletic facilities, team travel, scholarships, student admission to athletic events free of charge (except basketball and post-season play events).

Student Activities Fee: $161.25
Supports:
- Campus Activities & Programs (Including student organizations and the Campus Activities Board)
- Campus Recreation
- Elliott University Center
- Equipment Replacement
- Facilities Maintenance (for non-academic and non-administrative facilities)
- Spartan Card Center
- Safety Escort (through University Police)
- Leadership & Service-Learning
- Multicultural Affairs
- Student Government General Fund
- Media Board

Student Facilities Fee/Debt Service Fee: $294.58
Pays for debt incurred on “capital projects” which cannot be built using state funds – for example: soccer stadium, student recreation center, baseball stadium, EUC renovation, student health center expansion/renovation.

Education & Technology Fee: $175.00
Supports course materials and supplies. It also provides partial support of information technology for student class and out-of-class use.

Transportation Fee: $24.17
Covers UNCG students’ portion of the HEAT (Higher Education Area Transit). HEAT is the City of Greensboro’s university and college based public transportation system. Students may ride any HEAT or GTA (Greensboro Transit Authority) local bus fare free with their
UNCG ID card. In addition, this fee supports the Spartan Chariot campus transportation shuttle system (Weekday Loop, Spartan Village Express, and the Evening Safety Shuttle) which operates during the Fall and Spring semesters. The shuttle serves to provide the campus with efficient and safe campus transportation, reduce vehicular congestion and decrease the demand for proximity parking.

**Health Services Fee: $142.00**

Supports health, counseling, and wellness services at the Anna Gove Student Health Center. Services include: primary medical care, women’s health, blood pressure checks, immunizations, allergy injections, flu shots, laboratory and digital x-ray, psychiatric care, pharmacy services, nurse clinic, sports medicine, counseling services, and wellness/health education programs. While medical office visits are pre-paid by this fee, there are charges associated with lab tests, x-rays, medications, etc. although these are often below the market rate within the Greensboro community if one received these services off campus.

**Registration Fee: $6.00**

The registration fee covers the cost of administration and support services provided during the registration process.

[http://sa.uncg.edu/about-student-fees/#sthash.51bNjbhy.dpuf](http://sa.uncg.edu/about-student-fees/#sthash.51bNjbhy.dpuf)

Assistantships & Scholarships

Assistantships are awarded on a competitive basis to qualified, full-time graduate students. Stipends for Teaching Assistants, Graduate Assistants, and Research Assistants include a stipend and a contribution toward health insurance coverage. In addition, some stipends include a tuition waiver.

Teaching Assistantships

In our Department, we try to maintain compensation consistency among the teaching assistantships we award. In practice this means that some students receive a higher stipend, but no tuition waiver. Other students receive a lower stipend along with a tuition waiver.

All stipends assume a 20-hour per week workload, the normal maximum allowed for funding full-time students. To fulfill the teaching contract, teaching assistants assist with CST 105: Introduction to Communication Studies in the fall and spring semesters, under the direction of the Basic Course Director.

The role of a Teaching Assistant is an important one in serving the educational goals of our Department and the University. Our Department has a significant role in the Speaking Across the Curriculum component of UNCG undergraduate education. CST 105 is a core course for undergraduate majors in Communication Studies. It is also a course many undergraduate students across the University take in partial fulfillment of their General Education Curriculum. UNCG requires that students satisfactorily complete two Speaking Intensive courses for graduation. As a result, our Department serves both our majors and students in diverse areas of study in multiple offerings of the CST 105 course.

The Department takes seriously its commitment to provide teaching assistants the conceptual and practical skills they need to succeed in the CST 105 classroom and to ensure a positive classroom experience for instructors and their students. To meet this commitment to skillful pedagogy, all incoming teaching assistants enroll in CST 599: Communication Pedagogy in their first semester in the program (fall).

In CST 599, taught by the Basic Course Director, teaching assistants engage the materials for teaching CST 105, including a common textbook and syllabus. They also engage relevant readings and practices. Throughout the course, and in regular meetings with the Basic Course Director, teaching assistants learn effective and engaging teaching strategies to develop their skills and strengthen their confidence in the classroom.

As currently structured, the teaching assistant program asks first-year Teaching Assistants to assist with CST 105 by attending the large lecture one day a week and running two breakout sections two days a week. Second-year Teaching Assistants will, generally, serve as Senior Teaching Assistants and teach their own stand-alone sections of CST 105. However, to be eligible to teach a stand-alone section in their second year, graduate students must satisfactorily complete 18 hours of Communication Studies graduate coursework during their first year. Please note that we cannot guarantee that all qualified graduate students will be
assigned a stand-alone section in their second year as such teaching assignments must depend on the needs of our undergraduate students and available funding.

**Graduate and Research Assistantships**

University-wide, Graduate and Research Assistantships are awarded competitively to full-time students who meet the qualifications for the assignment. Positions range from one to several semesters, depending on the funding source of the stipend and generally equate, on an hourly basis, to a teaching stipend. Positions range from administrative support in centers and departments to research and administrative support for faculty research projects.

Students seeking a graduate or research assistantship are free to investigate opportunities in any department, office, or center at UNCG. An excellent resource for opportunities is Career Services (csc.uncg.edu). Very often, students who are diligent in their search are successful. In addition, the Director of Graduate Study maintains a list of our graduate students interested in these assistantships and will contact students when announcements of opportunities become available.

**Other assistantship opportunities**

**University Speaking Center**

The University Speaking Center provides one-on-one tutoring and instructional workshop services for UNCG students, faculty, employees, and members of the Greensboro community. Assistance is offered in the preparation and delivery of speeches, development of knowledge and skill in interpersonal communication, and group or team communication. The staff includes both undergraduate and graduate student tutors from departments across the University including Communication Studies.

Some graduate assistantships may be available. Interested students with previous speaking center or communication lab experience should contact the Director of the Speaking Center, Kim Cuny.

More information about the Speaking Center, including contact information, can be found at: speakingcenter.uncg.edu.

**Resident Hall Staff Positions**

A limited number of residence hall staff positions are available to qualified graduate students. Address inquiries to:

Director of Resident Life
UNCG
PO Box 26170
Greensboro, NC 27402-6170
Phone (336) 334-5636

More information about Residence Life can be found at: www.uncg.edu/rli
The John Andrew and Margaret E. Robinson Fellowship in Communication Studies
The John Andrew and Margaret E. Robinson Fellowship in Communication Studies is awarded each spring to a continuing full-time graduate student on the basis of merit. In recent years, the amount of the award has been approximately $1500 a year, or about $750 each semester.

Information regarding the application process can be found at:
http://cst.uncg.edu/graduate-scholarships/

The Glenn-Tedford Fund
This fund, begun in honor of former department faculty members Ethel Glenn and Tom Tedford, provides modest financial support for the scholarly development of graduate students. For more information on funds available, contact the Director of Graduate Study.

The Robert Schwartzman Fund
Established by Communication Studies Professor Roy Schwartzman, this fund honors his father, who never had the opportunity to get a college education. We use this fund to support outstanding applicants with a strong interest in Communication research.

As mentioned above, the GSA also has some funds available for graduate student development.
Plan of Study

Introduction
Our master’s program holds to the University’s broad objective to offer students a reasonable and comprehensive mastery of a chosen field of study. In Communication Studies, we subscribe to that objective through a program that emphasizes our mission statement goals and faculty foci in research and teaching.

The Plan of Study is designed to help students structure and tailor their studies in ways that serve their particular research and learning goals within that broad objective. Students and their advisor, the Director of Graduate Study, begin to formulate a plan upon a student’s admission to the program.

Submission of a completed plan of study is due in the Graduate School before students complete 50% of the program (15 hours). If any changes are made to the plan subsequent to the submission, the Director of Graduate Study and student will submit a revised plan to the Graduate School.

General Requirements
The plan of study consists of required and elective coursework choices to accommodate diverse theoretical and research interests in the program. The minimum number of semester hours required for a Master of Arts in Communication Studies is 30. The structure of the program is as follows:

- Required core coursework: 6 hours, consisting of the core courses, CST 601 and 602
- Required capstone project: 3 hours
- Elective coursework: 21 hours, to be taken primarily within the Department of Communication Studies

The core is structured to help prepare students to think intelligently and critically about their own research projects and is designed to position students to gain a more meaningful experience in their elective coursework choices.

Given the core’s significant role in the program, all incoming full time graduate students are required to complete the core courses during their first year as graduate students. As a reminder, full time graduate students at UNCG are defined as students enrolled in six semester hours of coursework. The core is offered in a seminar format one evening per week, in the following sequence:

CST 601: Engaging Communication Theory, fall semesters only
CST 602: Engaging Communication Research Methodology, spring semesters only

Teaching Assistants are also required to enroll in CST 599, Communication Pedagogy during their first semester, to fulfill a condition of their teaching contract. This course fulfills three hours in the elective coursework category on the plan of study. CST 599 is offered during fall semesters only. Part time students, defined as those enrolled in fewer than six semester hours, are strongly encouraged to complete the core during their first year. If professional and/or personal obligations
prevent taking these six hours the first year, please remember that CST 601 and CST 602 are
offered only in the fall and spring, respectively.

The second component of required work for graduate students is satisfactory completion of the
final research project, CST 698: Capstone Experience in Communication. A full discussion of the
capstone project follows in the “Capstone Experience in Communication” section of the
Handbook.

The core courses and capstone project make up the nine required hours, which leaves 21 hours
available for elective coursework.

Elective Coursework (21 semester hours in graded courses, to be taken primarily within the
Department of Communication Studies)
Elective coursework gives students the flexibility to refine their interests and prepare for the
capstone final research project. Some constraints apply in these 21 hours to ensure academic
strength and a coherent plan tailored to students’ research foci. These include:

500-level coursework
A maximum of 9 hours of coursework, or three courses, may be taken at the 500 level.

500-level courses at UNCG are “bridge” courses, open to selected senior undergraduates and all
graduate students. A separate syllabus for graduate students in 500-level courses sets out higher
order learning objectives and assignments consistent with graduate education expectations.

At UNCG, 100-level through 400-level courses are undergraduate offerings. No graduate credit
can be given for these courses.

Optional cognate coursework in other disciplines
Graduate students may also pursue relevant graded cognate courses in other disciplines. Credit for
one such course may be included in the minimum 30-hour plan of study, with approval of the
Director of Graduate Study. This flexibility recognizes the interdisciplinary nature of many
research inquiries and, at the same time, acknowledges the need to preserve the coherence of a
master’s degree awarded in Communication Studies.

Independent study
Independent study hours do not count toward the minimum 30-hour plan of study.
Department of Communication Studies  
Master of Arts Plan of Study

Graduate Student: ______________________________ ID: ___________________

Term/Year entered program_______________ Date plan approved: _____________

Graduate Studies Director signature: _______________________________

Graduate student signature: _________________________________________

Total minimum program hours: 30

1) Total Required core coursework and capstone research project: 9 hours
2) Required core coursework (6 semester hours):

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<th>Semester taken</th>
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<tr>
<td>CST601</td>
<td>Engaging Communication Theory</td>
<td>Fall</td>
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<td>CST602</td>
<td>Engaging Communication Research</td>
<td>Spring</td>
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<td>Methodology</td>
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Required capstone research project (3 semester hours, taken in 3 1-hour credit hours during the last three semesters of study):

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<tr>
<td>CST698</td>
<td>Capstone Experience in Communication</td>
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Elective coursework: (21 semester hours in Communication Studies graded courses)  
Of these 21, a maximum of 9 hours may be at the 500-level.

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Cognate courses (optional, up to 3 hours included in the minimum 30 hours required):

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Graduate Student Research

Research integrity
Our program offers several avenues for a graduate student to pursue her/his research interests, including coursework, a capstone project, a research practicum, and independent study.

Regardless of the particular avenue, please keep in mind a few key issues. First, all research projects should have some measure of faculty oversight. For course projects, such oversight is often fairly straightforward as the project fits within the constraints of the assignment and is discussed with the faculty member and peers during development. For projects outside of a course, a student must be more proactive in seeking guidance.

Second, all research projects involving human subjects must be reviewed by a member of the Graduate Faculty. If a student plans to make the findings of a project public, whether through oral or written presentation, the project must have prior approval from the UNCG Institutional Review Board.

Third, often, graduate students will work with a faculty member on the faculty member’s research program. We pride ourselves on fostering research collaborations with our graduate students. Within that context, a few rules must apply. Any “products” derived from a faculty research project must be reviewed and approved by the supervising faculty member before dissemination to anyone outside of the research project. Supervising faculty members reserve the right to alter and/or refuse to send something out to audiences external to the project. As well, supervising faculty members reserve the right to be a co-author on anything that goes out to external audiences. These kinds of requirements ensure the integrity of our scholarly projects and aid your own professional development.

Practicum in Communication Research (CST 652)
CST 652: Practicum in Communication Research aids graduate students in the conduct of Communication research through apprenticeship with a Graduate Faculty member.

Our Practicum course is designed for students to learn how to conduct original research under the direct supervision of a Communication Studies faculty member. The Practicum course extends students’ education through practical, hands on research experiences in the discipline of Communication. Current student and faculty interests will drive specific offerings of this course. A typical offering will likely require synthesis of communication scholarship, instruction in the design of research projects as well as data collection and analysis, and may extend to the oral and written presentation of research results to various audiences. CST 652 may be included on a Plan of Study.

Independent Study (CST 650)
An independent study gives a student an opportunity to pursue a more focused, in-depth examination of specific communication theories, methods, and practices that align with their research interests and those of a faculty member. An independent study can be a useful addition to a student’s coursework on those rare occasions when scheduled coursework cannot fulfill a student’s progression toward a specific capstone project. Students need to have completed the core
courses and some elective coursework in order to know if more depth might be needed as they move toward a final research project.

An independent study consists of a graded course in guided readings and research under the instruction of a graduate faculty member. Readings and assignments are designed to provide students a level of knowledge in an area of communication scholarship not available in a regularly scheduled course in the graduate curriculum or in guided readings during the first two phases of the capstone project.

Generally, students find that the focused readings and conceptual work associated with the first two phases of the capstone project provide considerable and sufficient conceptual depth of study for the completion of their projects.

*Independent studies do not substitute for regularly scheduled coursework. Thus, we do not include independent study credit hours in the minimum 30 hours required for the degree.*

Students are eligible to enroll in independent study when they have met the following requirements:

- Completed the 2 core courses (6 hours) and at least 3 electives (9 hours) for a total of 15 hours
- Earned a minimum of 3.0 GPA overall
- Enrolls for no more than 3 credit hours in independent study during a semester

If a faculty member agrees to direct an independent study, and you have met the eligibility requirements, complete the Independent Study Permission through the Graduate School.
Capstone Experience in Communication

In lieu of a comprehensive examination or thesis, Communication Studies graduate students are required to complete a satisfactory capstone experience in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a master’s degree.

What is a capstone? The term is borrowed from architectural building design. A capstone on a building is a finished cover or cap at the top of a construction, originally made of stone.

This image of a capstone is apt. Faculty members regard graduate students as emerging scholars and professionals who embark on their own construction of themselves as masters of communication studies. The “building” begins with a program that offers a rich intellectual and experiential foundation for this construction of the graduate. The culminating building experience, or capstone, enables students to build on the program’s foundation in order to conceptualize, design, and bring shape to their communicative voices.

Finally, architects and builders rarely stop with one construction. Like them, students will continue to build and rebuild themselves in public, professional, and personal contexts.

Satisfactory completion of the capstone experience includes three requirements:
1. Completion of a final research project
2. Public presentation of the project to Department faculty and other students
3. Completion of the exit questionnaire on the MA program

The Final Research Project (CST 698 – 3 semester hours)
Timeline:
The capstone final research project is a focused, in-depth inquiry and analysis of a communicative practice, phenomenon, or object. To help students move productively and thoughtfully through their projects, the capstone assignment progresses in three phases over the final three semesters in the program, though students enroll for all three credit hours in their final semester in the program. For full-time students who are on track to complete the program in two years, the capstone progresses as follows:
   • Spring semester, first year: phase one
   • Fall semester, second year: phase two
   • Spring semester, second year: phase three
Part-time students also begin the first phase of CST 698 during the first of their final three semesters in the program. The Director of Graduate Study will collaborate with each student on her/his Plan of Study to determine when to begin the capstone experience.

CST 698 – Phase one – Annotated Bibliography
Most full time students hoping to complete the program in two years will not have a clear commitment to a specific capstone project, nor do faculty encourage them to have such a commitment, during the spring semester of their first year. For most students, then, the first phase of the capstone consists in completing an extensive annotated bibliography of communication scholarship for three levels of interest: primary, secondary, and tertiary. Often, these three levels of interest are related and provide students their first opportunity to think through and begin to narrow
their range of interests. For example, students generally begin to notice if they are interested and intrigued about patterns and issues that arise in contexts of:

- Public communication (politics, community, social change, media)
- Personal communication (identity, conflict, relationships)
- Organizational communication (structures, patterns, change)
- Conflict negotiation (interpersonal, organizational, public, or mediated discourse)
- Health communication (public, organizational, clinical, interpersonal)
- Intercultural communication (diverse cultural voices)
- Gendered communication
- Communication ethics

To help students complete satisfactory work in this phase, a student’s advisor, faculty mentor, and coursework instructors can provide guidance for reading selections based on these interests. Students may want to extend the completion of this phase over the summer, if necessary, to read more widely. Please note that students need to satisfactorily complete the first phase prior to beginning the second phase.

**CST 698 – Phase two – Development of the Research Project**

Full time students should begin to arrive at a more focused area of interest when they begin their second year in the program. Part time students, similarly, should be focused on an area of research as they begin their final two semesters in the program.

Specifically, the second phase involves several steps to develop a research project. Students on track to graduate in the spring of an academic year should begin to develop a communication research question or questions for their projects during the fall of that academic year. Development of the research project begins with further narrowing the areas of research interest, drawing on the literature examined and summarized in the first phase and interests that emerged in subsequent coursework.

After identification of a context or problem of interest, begin to consider the following:

1. Identify questions of communicative interest and relevance to the context or problem.
2. Identify the communication, phenomenon, discourse, or artifact you want to examine.
3. Develop a conceptual framework that might inform your approach to this question or questions.
4. Identify the research methodology or methodologies that might be well suited to examine your research question and communication phenomenon.

With a general grasp of these four issues, students identify a graduate faculty member whose research interests align with their own conceptual and methodological interests, and who expresses a willingness to serve as the director of a capstone project. Together, the student and capstone director will refine the questions of communicative interest; identify the communication discourse or artifacts for analysis; develop the conceptual framework that guides the analysis; and, identify the research methodology or methodologies suitable to guide the analysis.

The faculty capstone director and student collaborate to identify a second faculty member who will serve as a second reader of drafts and the final research document. The reader may also contribute to theoretical and methodological approaches to the project, and suggest additional readings once
the project and research question are defined. The reader may also serve as a co-director. By the end of this semester, structure a capstone agreement with your director (a sample capstone agreement form is included at the end of this section).

Completion of this phase includes satisfactory progress toward the following:
• A clear research question(s) is situated in current communication scholarship to address a gap in the scholarship and/or to deepen and extend conceptual understanding of a communicative practice.
• A comprehensive literature review is underway to situate and support the project in conceptual and methodological terms. This review expands the work begun in the first phase of the capstone, or involves a new literature review to support a shift in research interest.
• A set of specific data to address the research question and the methodological approach to follow is located. IRB approval if needed, is secured.
• A timeline for meetings, drafts, and due dates is established.

CST698 – Phase three – Completing the Capstone
During this final hour, students complete the research project. Typically, this phase includes completion of remaining data collection and analysis, development of research implications, and presentation of the project in writing and orally, to Department faculty and students.

Capstone research projects vary significantly in their theoretical, conceptual, and methodological approaches. Even so, satisfactory projects exhibit some commonalities.

The following offers a set of guidelines all students should follow, however different their questions and methodologies.

Capstone Format
The capstone form is a scholarly essay, 25-30 pages in length. Satisfactory projects, with revisions, are typically suitable for submission for presentation at a local, regional, or national conference. Sometimes, capstones are revised for submission for publication in local, regional, or national journals, but this is not a condition for the satisfactory completion of a project.

Structure:
A. Introduction. In this section, identify a relevant research problem and articulate a thesis to be defended in relation to the research problem.
B. Conceptual framework: Situate your question in the broader context of communication research. What is the theoretical rationale that grounds your question? What concepts guide your examination of the communication phenomenon, practice, or object? What questions arise out of the intersection of the research problem and conceptual framework?
C. Methodology and method: Articulate and defend a methodology and subsequent method you will employ to collect, analyze, and interpret your data.
D. Analysis: Articulate how the conceptual framework illuminates and helps you interpret the data examined.
E. Implications: Summarize your findings and discuss the “big picture” implications of these, whether for theory, practice, or both. Consider directions for future research by
Communication scholars. Emphasize what other Communication scholars and practitioners may learn from your work.

F. Use APA style guidelines to format the essay.

**Assessment Criteria**

**Grading**

Capstone projects are graded as either “S” for satisfactory or “U” for unsatisfactory. If a student receives an unsatisfactory grade on the first attempt to satisfy the capstone requirement, one additional attempt to achieve a satisfactory grade is permitted. If a student fails to meet the Department’s minimal criteria for assessing a satisfactory capstone, the Graduate School Dean is notified, who will send the student a letter of dismissal from the program.

**Public Presentation of Project**

**Presentation timeline**

All graduating students present a summary of their capstone project in the semester they graduate. Historically, presentations are made at the end of classes, on the day after Reading Day in May or in December. Almost all capstones are completed and presented in May.

**Format**

The format for the presentation follows a conference panel model. The audience consists of Department faculty and graduate students, and any other interested faculty or community members.

Presenters take approximately 10-15 minutes to summarize the key points of their projects. After all presentations are made, a question and answer period of 30 minutes or so follows. During Q & A, anyone in the audience can direct questions or comments to any of the presenters.

**Exit Questionnaire**

All graduating students complete an exit questionnaire on the MA program, to be given to the Director of Graduate Study by the deadline for posting final grades for the semester. Since this date varies slightly with academic calendars, the Director will provide specific dates to students each semester.
Department of Communication Studies
Capstone: Final Research Project Timeline and Agreement
Please give a copy of this agreement to the Director of Graduate Study

Date ____________________________

Student ___________________________

Faculty Director _____________________

Reader (or Co-director) _________________________

Project topic __________________________________

Timeline for completion of capstone components:

Refine research question by ____________________________ Date

Complete literature review by ____________________________ Date

Secure IRB approval, if required, by ____________________________ Date

Gather data by ____________________________ Date

Complete first draft by ____________________________ Date

Complete subsequent drafts, as needed, by ____________________________ Date

Complete final draft by ____________________________ Date

Meeting Schedule Dates:

Director signature _______________________________________

Reader (or Co-director) signature _______________________________________

Student signature _______________________________________

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Graduate Faculty

Professors
Spoma Jovanovic, PhD
Communication and communities; communication ethics; social justice; service learning

Christopher N. Poulos, PhD (Department Head)
Relational communication; ethnography; philosophy of communication; film; dialogue

Roy Schwartzman, PhD
Figurative language; rhetoric of science and technology; computer-mediated communication; critical theory; Holocaust studies; public address

Associate Professors
Sharon L Bracci, PhD
Public deliberation and decision-making; communication ethics; argumentation; health communication; biomedical ethics

David Carlone, PhD
Organizational communication; socio-cultural theory; cultural studies of work, organization

Cerise Glenn, PhD
Cultural identity and identity negotiation; African-American communication and culture; occupational socialization and identification of diverse groups; organizational culture; third wave feminism

Peter M. Kellett, PhD
Conflict analysis and management; narrative methodology

Etsuko Kinefuchi, PhD
Intercultural communication; language and culture; cultural identity and identity negotiation

Marianne LeGreco, PhD
Health communication; healthcare institutions; public health policy

Elizabeth J. Natalle, PhD
Gender and communication theory; interpersonal processes; feminist criticism

Loreen Olson, PhD (Director of Graduate Studies)
Gender; family communication; relationships; intimate partner violence, campus sexual assault; dark side of relational/family communication

Lecturer
Jessica Delk McCall, PhD (Basic Course Director)
Communication pedagogy; small group communication; relational communication; educational philosophy