Communication Studies Program Handbook

Welcome

Each one of us needs communication skills to enjoy healthy interpersonal relationships, to manage small groups and organizations effectively, to speak with knowledge and confidence, to evaluate complex data critically, to guard against specious reasoning, and to ensure the development of sound public policy. These skills require advanced training: thus the crucial importance of an advanced degree in Communication Studies.

We offer a wide range of useful courses in interpersonal, small group, organizational, intercultural, critical-cultural, and public/political communication, including topics such as relationship development, family communication, health communication, conflict resolution, the ethics of persuasion, public speaking, argumentation and debate, gender communication, and environmental and ecological communication.

We are of the belief that the fortunes of communication, citizenship, and social solidarity rise and fall in unison.

Mission Statement

The Department of Communication Studies’ MA program is committed to fostering an intellectually robust, empirically grounded, and socially engaged master’s degree that will enrich students’ knowledge and skills for the unique challenges of our day. Our graduate students seek to engage, inspire, and positively impact their communities. They join us to improve public policy, defend justice, promote health, enhance mediation, and otherwise help the world to communicate more effectively and humanely. Artful communication, in turn, brings leadership opportunities.

We teach the communicative arts, from interpersonal relationship development to public persuasion, applying them in a vibrant, unique, and exciting urban setting. In our MA program, students engage a wide spectrum of communities across a wide spectrum of communicative themes, concluding their experience with a scholarly thesis or professional paper/project.

Our program is a 36-credit degree. We offer two “tracks”: one in Advanced Communication Research and one in Community Engagement.

Advanced Communication Research

Our Advanced Communication Research track emphasizes the histories, theories, and methodologies of communication scholarship. It is designed as a pre-Ph.D. academic track that also prepares students for community college teaching, the legal profession, and other specialized degrees. Students in this track gain enhanced proficiency in the fundamental competencies of a critical, informed, and ethically reflexive citizenship. Required courses focus on theory, history, and methodology, and students complete the track by producing either a Thesis (30 credits plus 6 Thesis Writing credits) or Professional Paper/Project (36 credits). The skills students refine in this track include advanced scholarly research, writing, analytic thinking, historical contextualization, and ethical attunement. Graduates of this track typically pursue further academic, legal, educational, or non-profit careers.

Community Engagement

Our second track in Community Engagement is designed for individuals aspiring to work closely with their local constituencies by applying language and interaction-based competencies to address community-related issues. It is designed to offer a real world orientation to the practical communication-based challenges of our day. Students in this track will develop the ability to put communication theory into practice by examining the
ongoing political, cultural, socio-economic, and relational challenges that beset our communities every day. Required courses focus on translating communication theories into practical wisdom rooted in humanitarian values. Students complete the track by producing either a Thesis (30 credits plus 6 Thesis Writing credits) or Professional Paper/Project (36 credits). The skills students hone in this track include empirical and contextual analysis, problem solving and analytical thinking, conducting topical research, and mapping networks of influence. Students who graduate from this track typically pursue careers in the private sector as well as non-government and community outreach organizations.

Purpose
The purpose of this handbook is to provide program specific information that is not found in the UNLV Graduate Catalog. Students are responsible for understanding and following the policies and procedures delineated in this document and the UNLV Graduate Catalog, as well as the NSHE Code, UNLV Bylaws, and the UNLV Student Conduct Code. Questions about policies should be directed to the Graduate College: valarie.burke@unlv.edu or GradAssociateDean@unlv.edu.

Department Graduate Faculty


Donovan Conley, Associate Professor, Graduate Coordinator. Ph.D., 2004, University of Illinois. Rhetoric, cultural studies, taste/aesthetics and ecology/materiality.

Tara M. Emmers-Sommer, Professor, Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Education. Ph.D. 1995, Ohio University. Interpersonal communication, media, health, sex and gender studies.


Carlos Flores, Assistant Faculty in Residence. Ph.D., 2018, Arizona State University. Rhetorical theory and advocacy, vernacular communities, public sphere theory.

Jennifer Guthrie, Assistant Professor. Ph.D., 2013, University of Kansas. Interpersonal and small group communication, the “dark side” of interpersonal relationships, relational health.

David Henry, Professor. Ph.D., 1976, Indiana University. Rhetoric, political communication, social movements, persuasion.

Tara McManus, Associate Professor, Undergraduate Coordinator. Ph.D., 2008, The Pennsylvania State University. Interpersonal communication, relational communication, communication theory, research methods.

Natalie Pennington, Assistant Professor. Ph.D., 2015, University of Kansas. Interpersonal communication, communication in digital environments, grief communication.

Jacob Thompson, Associate Faculty in Residence, Director of the Sanford I. Berman Debate Forum. Ph.D., 2006, University of Kansas. Rhetorical theory and criticism, political communication, and argumentation and debate.

A current listing of the graduate faculty can be found in the UNLV Graduate Catalog. Faculty must hold either associate or full graduate faculty status to be involved in graduate education at UNLV. For up to date information regarding graduate faculty status in your department, visit the Graduate Faculty status web page.

Program Information

All students are required to take four core courses during their first year in the M.A. program: Survey of Graduate Studies (COM 710), Theories of Rhetorical Communication (COM 730), Rhetorical-Critical Research Methods (COM 711), and Empirical Research Methods (COM 712). Because each student's goals are unique,
the curriculum allows flexibility for developing individual degree programs. Such development aims to balance the communication discipline’s varied traditions in theoretical, methodological, and applied research.

Contact Information http://communicationstudies.unlv.edu/

Department Chair
Michael Bruner, GUA 4146, michael.bruner@unlv.edu

Graduate Coordinator
Donovan Conley, GUA 4145, donovan.conley@unlv.edu

Department Main Office
GUA 4150, donna.ralston@unlv.edu, (702)895-5125, fax: (702)895-4805

Program Requirements

Program requirements regarding admission, coursework and culminating experience are found in the graduate catalog.

Applications for admission to the Graduate Program in Communication Studies must include the materials listed below. Materials are uploaded onto the University’s Graduate Gateway at graduatecollege.unlv.edu. Application materials submitted by January 15 will receive priority consideration for fall admission (October 15 for spring admission), with a final deadline of March 1st. Applications submitted after the January 15 deadline will be considered on a “rolling” basis.

1. Completed application form in the Gateway system
2. All official transcripts. We seek a GPA in the range of 3.5.
3. Official Graduate Record Examination scores (international students must also send TOEFL scores). We seek a combined Verbal and Quantitative score in the range of 300, and an Analytic score in the range of 4.5.
4. Three letters of recommendation (including waiver form) addressing your ability to conduct graduate-level work (at least two should come from college or university faculty)
5. Personal Statement outlining applicant’s reasons for seeking a MA in Communication Studies.
6. Writing sample (e.g., a substantial paper written for an undergraduate class or thesis)
7. Graduate Teaching Assistantship Application (if student wishes to be considered for funding)

Overview of Degree Options

The Department of Communication Studies offers two “exit tracks” the student may take to achieve a Master of Arts degree in Communication Studies: Thesis and Professional Paper (aka Scholarly Research Project).

Students are also required to take and pass the Course in the Protection of Human Research Subjects prior to their first semester. Expect to spend approximately 4 hours on the exam. (Visit the website at the end of this paragraph for information on the exam and the exam itself.) Following successful completion of the exam, please provide a printed copy of your completion report to the Graduate Coordinator and keep another hard copy for your own records. https://www.citiprogram.org/default.asp

Thesis Track
The thesis track involves taking 30 credits of courses and writing a thesis (an additional 6 credits of COM 797). The thesis, consisting of multiple substantial chapters, is an original piece of research that the student writes under the guidance of a thesis advisor and thesis committee. Students in the Advanced Communication Research concentration who wish to pursue a Ph.D. should consider this track.

Professional Paper Track
The professional paper involves taking 36 credits of courses and writing a focused, profession-oriented
research project. The professional paper is a roughly forty-page project exhibiting original, case study driven research that the student writes under the guidance of a project advisor and committee. Students in the Community Engagement concentration who wish to pursue an industry-specific career, and/or are unsure if they want to pursue a Ph.D. degree, should consider this track.

Degree Requirements

*Thesis Track*
* A minimum GPA of 3.0 must be maintained in order to graduate
* 30 hours of course work
* Successful defense of roughly 25-30-page prospectus
* 6 hours of thesis (COM 797) completed thesis
* Successful oral defense of the thesis
* Final projects should be a minimum of 100 pages, contain multiple chapters, involve a close engagement with theory and/or history, and advance a fresh contribution to the relevant scholarly literature.

*Professional Paper Track*
* A minimum GPA of 3.0 must be maintained in order to graduate
* 36 hours of course work
* Successful defense of roughly 15-page prospectus
* Successful oral defense of the professional paper
* Final papers should be a minimum of 30 pages and should demonstrate a unique handling of theory, criticism, and/or social practice.
* Should be of publishable quality for a relevant trade journal
* All students, regardless of track, are responsible for conforming to Graduate College Deadlines. See https://www.unlv.edu/graduatecollege/graduation-deadlines

Advisory Committee Guidelines

*Thesis and Professional Paper Committees*

Composition: At the time of admission into the graduate program the Graduate Coordinator will serve as a student’s informal advisor. Toward the end of the first year—around April 1st—students should choose a Faculty Advisor from the Communication Studies Department’s Graduate Faculty. The Faculty Advisor assists students in shaping their intellectual project and course of study. The student’s Thesis or Professional Paper Committee consists of three members from the Department of Communication Studies, one of whom is the thesis advisor. All departmental members of the committee should have expertise in the student’s research area. A fourth member of the committee must come from outside the Department of Communication Studies and serves as the Graduate College Representative.

Duties: Although the student usually works most closely with his or her advisor, each member of the committee plays a role in guiding the student through the thesis and professional paper process. Each thesis and professional paper committee member reads the entire project and offers feedback. They are the ultimate judges of its quality and they make the decision on whether or not to pass the final project. The Graduate College Representative is charged with making sure there are no inequities in the project defense or other aspects of the process.
If a student needs to make changes to his/her advisory committee after submission of the initial appointment form, they may do so with the Change in Advisory Committee form.

**Degree Program Benchmarks**

*The Prospectus*

Before the student begins a thesis or professional paper, he/she composes a prospectus. The prospectus is a plan for writing the thesis or professional paper; it includes an introduction explaining why the study is being executed and how the study will be conducted, an overview of relevant theory, an explanation of the project’s methodology, and a timeline for completing the project. A prospectus meeting is scheduled, ideally early in the student’s third semester, in which the student’s committee makes suggestions for completing the study. Committee members should receive the prospectus no later than two weeks prior to the meeting.

Thesis and Professional Paper Distribution: The completed thesis should be distributed to the committee members no less than two weeks before the desired defense date. The professional paper should be distributed no less than one week before the desired defense date.

Oral defense: The oral defense must be scheduled at least three weeks before the end of the semester. No oral defenses will occur in the summer unless agreed upon by all committee members.

**Forms & Due Dates**

Upon admission, there are several forms that will need to be completed and submitted by the appropriate deadlines. The due dates below are approximations. For current deadline information, see: https://www.unlv.edu/graduatecollege/graduation-deadlines

Note: It is the student’s responsibility to be aware of and conform to all deadlines.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appointment of Advisory Committee work</td>
<td>Before completing more than 16 credits of course (end of 2nd semester)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospectus Approval</td>
<td>After your prospectus meeting (early 3rd semester)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notification of Oral Defense</td>
<td>Two weeks before your defense date (4th semester)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culminating Experience</td>
<td>After defense of the thesis or professional paper (4th semester)</td>
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The link to the necessary forms is below. There are several other forms that address special needs that are available on an as-needed basis.

https://www.unlv.edu/graduatecollege/study-timeline

**Graduate Classes Sequence**

Regardless of chosen track (Advanced Communication Research or Community Engagement), all graduate students must enroll in the required core courses in the following sequence:

**Year I – Fall**
- COM 725 – Introduction to Graduate Studies (required for TAs) (3 credits)
- COM 710 – Theories of Relational Communication (3 credits)
- COM 730 – Theories of Rhetorical Communication (3 credits)

**Year I – Spring**
- COM 711 – Rhetorical Critical Research Methods (3 credits)
- COM 712 – Quantitative Research Methods (3 credits)
* And 3 credits of COM electives (3 credits)

Year I – Summer
COM 793 – Pre-prospectus Research & Writing (3 credits)
* And 3 credits of COM electives (0-3 credits)
* Or 3 approved “outside” credits (0-3 credits)

Year II - Fall
COM 797 – Thesis Writing (0-3 credits)
* Or any 6-9 credits of COM electives (6-9 credits)
* And/Or 3 approved “outside” credits (0-3 credits)

Year II – Spring
COM 797 – Thesis Writing (3-6 credits)
* Or any 3-6 credits of COM electives (3-6 credits)
* Or 3 approved “outside” credits (0-3 credits)

TOTAL CREDITS 36

Note: Professional Paper track students need to take 2 additional courses to replace the thesis credits they would not be taking.

Professional Code of Ethics/Discipline Guidelines

UNLV Graduate College policy regarding academic integrity can be found in the graduate catalog.

All graduate students are encouraged to be active participants in the University and Department culture. As both members and representatives of the Communication Studies department, students are also expected to uphold an outward demeanor that reflects the highest standards of professionalism in their relations to students, faculty, staff, and other members of our campus community.

Annual Review Procedures

Students are required to make adequate yearly progress towards degree completion. The Communication Studies Graduate Faculty meets in late spring annually to discuss each student’s progress, noting accomplishments and highlighting areas in need of attention. Additionally, the Graduate Committee meets on an ad hoc basis to address student progress issues when it becomes necessary.

Students who are unable to meet the following baseline standards, in any given semester, become candidates for probation as outlined in the Graduate Catalog:

1. Maintain a GPA of 3.5 in COM coursework
2. Maintain steady progress toward Thesis or Professional Paper project
3. Maintain a regular presence in Department, College, and/or University activities
4. For GTAs: Receive teaching evaluations on par with the Departmental average of 4/5
5. For GTAs: Receive report of good standing from the Basic Course Director

Probation
If a student fails to successfully progress in their degree program, their department/school will recommend that the student be placed on probation by the Graduate College. Students on probation may be dismissed/separated from their program for failing to successfully meet the conditions of their probation by the deadline provided. Please see the Probation and Separation section of the Graduate Catalog for more information.

Financial Assistance
There are many opportunities for graduate students to receive scholarships, fellowships, assistantships (see next section), and other monetary awards. Please refer to the UNLV Graduate Catalog for a listing of programs available through the university. In addition to these university-wide programs, there are opportunities within the Department of Communication Studies that a student may be eligible for, including:

Graduate Teaching Assistantship stipends begin at $11250.00 annually, with the possibility of additional summer teaching valued at roughly $3000.00.

Second year students who remain in good standing may receive additional support working with the Summer Debate Camp, as TAs for an upper division course, or as Research Assistants working directly with graduate faculty.

The Greenspun College Scholarship: These are $1500 scholarships for students pursuing graduate degrees in the College. Only four are competitively awarded yearly. The application deadline is March 1st of every year.

Departmental Research Travel Support: Students may apply for up to $750.00 annually in travel funds to present original research at professional conferences. The department will support travel for as many as two conferences in an academic year, one per semester, with a maximum of $500.00 for a single trip.

University Scholarships and Fellowships: There are abundant sources of additional funding available through the Graduate College, most of which involve an application process. For more information on financing see:

https://www.unlv.edu/graduatecollege/financing

**Discipline Resources**

There are a number of helpful resources listed below that can assist you during your tenure as a M.A. student in the Department of Communication Studies at UNLV.

**Organizations**

National Communication Association: [http://www.natcom.org](http://www.natcom.org)

* Submission deadline for NCA is in March and the conference is the following November.


* Submission deadline for ICA is in November and the conference is the following spring or summer, depending on whether the conference is domestic or international.

International Association for Relationship Research: [http://www.iarr.org](http://www.iarr.org)

* IARR is a multidisciplinary organization that focuses on relationship research. Submission deadline is in the winter, with the conference being held the following summer. Conferences are held domestically and internationally. IARR includes a graduate conference as part of the main conference.

Western States Communication Association: [http://www.westcomm.org](http://www.westcomm.org)

* There are four regional organizations and conferences (Western, Central, Eastern, and Southern). UNLV is part of the western region. Submission deadline is in early September and the conference is the following February.

Rhetoric Society of America: [http://rhetoricsociety.org](http://rhetoricsociety.org)

* Society offers biennial conferences during even years and biennial institutes in odd years. These meetings are typically held in late May or early June.

Students are encouraged to get involved in doing research and participating in the conferences. Funding opportunities may be available through the Graduate Student Association (GPSA) (see below).
Links to Communication and Psychology Journals: http://guides.library.unlv.edu/c.php?g=332905
http://guides.library.unlv.edu/c.php?g=332890

University Resources

Academic Success Center
The goal of the Academic Success Center is to help students do well academically and complete their studies on time. They offer or will refer you to such programs and resources as tutoring, advising, skills testing, career exploration and more. They guide students every step of the way to the many established resources created to ensure they complete their educational goals. Learn more about the programs and services the center currently offers.

Alumni Association
With an alumni base 90,000 strong, the UNLV Alumni Association offers a variety of services and opportunities in support of alumni and their families. UNLV alumni are encouraged to support the values of higher learning through advocacy, involvement, and giving.

Commencement Office
Located in the UNLV Registrar’s Office, the commencement office is the last step in the graduation process. Please check with the commencement office for information on the commencement ceremony and your diploma; for all other information about graduate student degree completion and graduation, including thesis/dissertation requirements and doctoral hooding, please contact the Graduate College.

Office of Diversity Initiatives
The vision of the Office of Diversity Initiatives is to advocate, promote, and support the advancement of equity, inclusiveness, and empowerment of a continuously changing collegiate and global community. The mission of the Office of Diversity Initiatives is to provide leadership and support for UNLV’s diversity mission: to nurture equity, diversity, and inclusiveness that promotes respect, support, and empowerment. This Office also handles UNLV Title IX questions, inquiries, and reporting.

Disability Resource Center (DRC)
The DRC is committed to supporting students with disabilities at UNLV through the appropriate use of advocacy, accommodations, and supportive services to ensure access to campus courses, services, and activities. The DRC is the university-designated office that determines and facilitates reasonable accommodations in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Graduate students with disabilities must disclose to the DRC in order to receive appropriate accommodations.

Office of International Student and Scholars
International Students and Scholars (ISS) ensures compliance with both SEVIS (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System) and federal law, so that the university can continue to be authorized by the U.S. federal government to enroll international students; host and hire international scholars; assist and advise employment eligibility and authorization relating to international students and scholars, and visa, travel, and immigration issues; provide critical and specialized services to the international students and scholars of the UNLV community; and facilitate their transition to the campus and the U.S.

Jean Nidetch Women’s Center
The Jean Nidetch Women’s Center is committed to creating a supportive and inclusive environment for all genders through programming, services, and advocacy for the UNLV community. The Women’s Center has informational resources, brochures, and flyers for a variety of on and off campus organizations to help empower and protect yourself, and learn about your options. They also provide free tampons, pads, and condoms.

UNLV Libraries
UNLV Libraries has always been more than books; they are about encouraging students and creating quality programs that elevate growth and learning. Please visit their website for important information about the services they offer to graduate students.

Graduate & Professional Student Association (GPSA)
The Graduate & Professional Student Association serves all currently enrolled University of Nevada, Las Vegas graduate and professional students. The GPSA maintains the Graduate Student Commons located in the Lied Library room 2141. The facility a working office equipped with a copier, fax, flatbed scanners, color laser printer, office supplies, and computers with printers and a small kitchen area. The GPSA is the graduate student governance body at UNLV; the GPSA Council consists of one graduate student representative from each graduate department, and they meet monthly. The GPSA also provides volunteer opportunities, sponsors social events, and supports graduate student research through the graduate research and travel grants program.

Office of Student Conduct
The Office of Student Conduct is a student-centered, service-oriented office located within the Division of Student Affairs. The Office of Student Conduct collaborates with the UNLV community to provide an inclusive system through enforcement of the UNLV Student Code of Conduct by:

- Promoting awareness of student rights and responsibilities;
- Establishing accountability for student choices;
- Creating opportunities for involvement in the process; and
- Striving to uphold the values and ethics that advance the common good.

Office of Veteran Services
The UNLV Office of Veteran Services is staffed with veterans and GI Bill-experienced staff to assist more than 1,000 veterans, dependents, active duty service members, National Guard members, and reservists. Their mission is to develop a welcoming, veteran-friendly campus environment that fosters academic and personal success.

The Financial Aid & Scholarships Office
The Financial Aid & Scholarships Office supports higher-education access and persistence by providing financial aid to eligible students. The office partners with student organizations, the UNLV Foundation, the Graduate College, and other external constituents to provide financial aid learning opportunities and scholarship support for graduate students.

Writing Center
This is a free service to UNLV students to help you with any writing project, from papers to creative writing, to resumes, and we can work with you at any stage of the writing process. The center can help you brainstorm, make an outline, work on your drafts, or just be a soundboard for your ideas. The center staff can assist you in person, or via the Online Writing Lab (OWL) page.

**University Policies and Procedures**

Graduate students are responsible for knowing and acting in accordance with UNLV Policies and Procedures. To view the most commonly referenced campus policies and procedures, you can refer to the following websites:

- Academic Integrity
- Activation for Military Service
- FERPA/Privacy Rights
- Health Insurance - Mandatory
- Jeanne Clery Campus Safety and Security Report
- Proof of Immunization
- Policies and Procedures on the Protection of Research Subjects
- Rebelmail Policy
- Student Conduct Code
- Student Computer Use Policy
- Title IX

To ensure compliance with Graduate College policies and procedures, please review the relevant sections of the Graduate Catalog:

- Academic Calendar
- Academic Policies
- Admission and Registration Information
- Degree Progression Policies & Procedures

In addition, the Graduate College website contains additional information regarding policies and procedures.

Nothing in this handbook supersedes any NSHE, UNLV, or Graduate College policy.

**Handbook Information**

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<th>Revised by</th>
<th>Changes summary</th>
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<td>Summer 2018</td>
<td>Donovan Conley</td>
<td>Deletion of Exams Track; deletion of Portfolio; addition of faculty; addition of Evaluation criteria; minor line edits.</td>
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