

Department of  
Communication Studies  
*Graduate Handbook*

*2021-2022 Edition*

Master of Arts Program

**Disclaimer:** At the time of publication, the Graduate Handbook represents the best available summary of the regulations that guide graduate study in Communication Studies at CSULB. However, the University's official and complete policies are continually revised and published annually in the CSULB Catalog. Graduate students must adhere to those official policies in effect at the time of their advancement to candidacy. In any instance where this Handbook differs from the official policies of the University, as stated in the CSULB Catalog, this Handbook is in error.

# Graduate Handbook

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# Department of Communication Studies

## *Graduate Courses*

- 531. Administering for the Forensic Program
- 541. Rhetorical Theory and Criticism I
- 546. Communication Theory and Research I
- 590A. Theory and Criticism of Presidential Rhetoric
- 610. Seminar in Interpersonal Communication
- 623. Seminar in Communication Technology and Media
- 620. Seminar in Organizational Communication
- 630. Seminar Intercultural Communication
- 633. Seminar in Interpretive Communication
- 634. Performance and Ethnography
- 635. Seminar in Communication Criticism
- 636. Seminar in American Public Communication
- 637. Seminar in International Public Address
- 639. Seminar in Communication and Popular Culture
- 640. Rhetorical Theory and Criticism II
- 644. Seminar in Applied Communication
- 646. Communication Theory and Research II
- 650. Seminar in Instructional Communication
- 697. Directed Research
- 699. Thesis Writing

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GS 700. Students who have completed all requirements for the degree except for the thesis or comprehensive exams are required to be enrolled during the semester in which they intend to graduate. Students may enroll in Graduate Studies 700 to fulfill this requirement.

# Department of Communication Studies

## *Graduate Study*

The Communication Studies Department offers a Masters of Arts degree in Communication Studies. Our program provides students with advanced instruction in the major theories and research methods in the academic discipline of communication. Our graduates typically go on to doctoral programs or become communication professors at the community college level. Our courses provide students a broad foundation in the discipline of communication. As such, we do not offer areas of specialty, but students can take a variety of elective courses (see list below).

The MA in Communication is designed to:

1. introduce students to the history and diversity of the communication discipline
2. provide in-depth instruction in the major theories and methods that are the foundation of the communication discipline
3. develop students' critical reading and writing skills
4. train students to collect, analyze, interpret, and present data
5. develop students' competencies as instructors in higher education
6. develop students' understanding of key communication skill necessary for leadership and participation in diverse communication settings

Our department offers students a traditional education in communication by offering courses covering both humanistic and empirical foundations. We offer seminars in interpersonal, organizational, intercultural, and instructional communication, rhetorical theory and criticism, as well as popular culture and performance studies. Students are required to begin their program of study by taking a core curriculum designed to prepare the student for more advanced level course work. The core curriculum includes four courses that cover rhetorical theory and criticism, and communication theory and research methods. We do NOT offer courses in media production, Internet design, public relations, or public speaking skills. Our curriculum does not include Journalism, Radio, TV, or Film Studies/Production.

# Program Requirements

1. A minimum of thirty hours of graduate work in Communication Studies distributed as follows:

A. COMM 541 and 546 (6 units) preferably completed in the first semester of graduate study and prior to advancement to candidacy.

B. COMM 640 and 646 (6 units) preferably completed in the second semester of graduate study and prior to advancement to candidacy.

C. 18 units of graduate level electives or 15 units of electives plus 3 thesis units

Please note that internships and student teaching cannot be included in the required thirty units.

No more than 3 units may be taken outside the Communication Studies Department or transferred from another institution. The graduate advisor must approve any courses taken outside the department or transferred from another institution.

No more than 3 units may be taken at the undergraduate level. If taken, such units must be in 4xx level courses with the approval of the graduate advisor.

Academic Probation: Students who earn one or more "C" grades in their first semester of graduate study (i.e., in COMM 541 and/or COMM 546) will have their teaching assistantship revoked and will be placed on academic probation. The Graduate Committee, in consultation with the student and core professor/s, will craft and approve a remediation plan. The remediation plan is decided on a case-by-case basis with the aim of helping the student complete twelve units of graduate core courses with an average of "B" or better (see below regarding Advancement to Candidacy). The remediation plan may include requirements such as completing a prerequisite course (e.g., COMM 301 or COMM 306), GAing for an undergraduate core class, and/or regular meetings with an assigned mentor. Students may not advance to candidacy until they have satisfied the terms of their remediation plan.

2. Completion of the Department's Comprehensive Examination or of an acceptable thesis.

3. The Department expects its graduate students to possess the writing skills necessary for advanced study. The University mandates that students pass the Graduate Writing Proficiency Examination or its equivalent. Persons who have passed the CSULB University Writing Examination do not need to take the test again. If you believe you have taken an equivalent examination, consult the Graduate Advisor. Students should pass an acceptable writing examination no later than the end of the first semester of graduate study.

4. Students must comply with all University regulations outlined in the *CSULB Catalog*. All



requirements date from the time at which a student receives approval for Advancement to Candidacy, not from when a student begins graduate study.

## Communication Studies 697

COMM 697 (Directed Research) should enable students to study topics and methods not normally available through regular coursework. The policy regarding COMM 697 is:

1. The Graduate Committee will approve inclusion of COMM 697 in a graduate program only if:

A. the research topic is not available through regular coursework during the student's tenure in graduate study,

B. the student has completed 6 units from the graduate core courses,

C. the student has been advanced to candidacy or has submitted her or his Graduate Program to the Graduate Advisor.

2. Students may take a maximum of three units of COMM 697.

3. Candidates must secure prior approval for COMM 697. Prior to the semester of enrollment, students must submit two forms to the Graduate Advisor:

A. a "Petition for Directed Research,"

B. an "Agreement for Independent Study Course" signed by the graduate faculty member directing the independent research.

4. The Graduate Committee will determine whether the proposed study conforms to the purposes of COMM 697. The faculty member directing the research has the responsibility of judging the student's ability to complete the research and also assigning the grade for the project.

5. Only members of the Department graduate faculty may direct COMM 697.

## Advancement to Candidacy

### **What is Advancement to Candidacy?**

Advancement to candidacy defines a student's program of study and establishes her or him as an official graduate student the University. At this point, students "map out" the remainder of their graduate program at CSULB and are eligible to write a thesis or take comprehensive exams. At this point, you are officially a "candidate" for the M.A. degree.

### **How do I qualify for Advancement to Candidacy?**

In order to advance to candidacy, you must:

- A. Be enrolled in the semester or session in which you request to advance to candidacy.
- B. Have no deficiencies (e.g., incomplete courses, unfulfilled prerequisites, academic probation).
- C. Have a cumulative GPA of at least 3.0 (B) for all work taken (including any graduate classes and prerequisite undergraduate classes).
- D. Have completed twelve units of graduate core courses with an average of "B" or better.
- E. Have passed the Graduate Writing Proficiency Examination or completed its equivalent.

### **What is involved in Advancing to Candidacy?**

If you meet all of the qualifications of advancement to candidacy listed above, you will need to submit to the Graduate Advisor a completed College of Liberal Arts "Advancement to Candidacy Form". The Graduate Advisor will then seek the approval of the Graduate Committee and the Graduate Dean of the College of Liberal Arts for your advancement.

Your program should show both classes you have taken so far, and remaining classes you plan to take to complete your degree. You submitted programs should indicate the semester in which courses were taken or will be taken, and report ALL GRADES in completed courses. No grades of Incomplete (I) or Satisfactory Progress (SP) can appear on the program.

Students considering the thesis option should submit a program consisting of ten or more courses, and star (\*) the class or classes that will be omitted if he or she chooses to write a thesis.

You must submit the appropriate petition to the Graduate Advisor and the Graduate Committee and receive approval before including classes taken outside of the Communication Studies Department on your program of study. This applies to both courses taken at CSULB in other department, and to ones transferred from other colleges or universities. Failure to get prior permission may result in you not being able to include such classes in your program of study.

### **When do I advance to Candidacy?**

Typically, most students meet the requirements for advancement to candidacy after completing their first year of course work. Students **MUST** advance to candidacy at least one semester prior to the semester in which they intend to graduate. Therefore, if you plan to graduate in the Spring semester of your second year, you must advance to candidacy in the Fall semester of your second year.

The deadline each semester is exactly four (4) weeks before the last day of instruction. Do not wait until the deadline! The Graduate Committee may require the student to resubmit a program. Students cannot take Comprehensive Examinations nor enroll in COMM 698 (thesis hours) until a program is approved.

### **What if I want to change my program of study after it has been approved?**

If you want to change your program of study after it has received approval, you must submit the College of Liberal Arts "Change of Program Form" to the Graduate Advisor and Graduate Committee for approval. You must receive approval before taking any course involved in the change. Otherwise, the course will not be considered as part of your minimum 30 units needed to complete the degree.

### **What else do I need to know about Advancing to Candidacy?**

You are subject to all of the requirements for graduate students in effect at the time of your advancement to candidacy. In other words, if requirements change after you advance to candidacy, the new requirements do not apply to you - you are still required to follow the rules in effect at the time when you advanced to candidacy.

## Comprehensive Examination Option

### **What is the Comprehensive Examination?**

The Comprehensive Examination is a written and oral examination covering material common to all Master's degree candidates and material specific to the courses the candidate personally took in their Program of Study. The written portion of the exam consists of two sessions during a single week. The portion pertaining to the communication science core and associated electives is conducted on campus during one three-hour period. The portion pertaining to the rhetoric core and associated electives is given as a take-home test. The oral defense portion of the exam, which is usually held two weeks after the written section is completed, gives the student the opportunity to elaborate on written answers and answer questions that the committee members may have about the student's responses.

### **Who is Eligible to Take the Comprehensive Examination?**

Students may take the Comprehensive Examination if they have:

1. been advanced to candidacy (see the Advancement to Candidacy section to review requirements for this process), and

2. obtained approval from the Graduate Committee

Please note that once a student elects the Comprehensive Examination option at the time of approval of their Graduate Program, the student may not change.

### **Why Choose the Comprehensive Examination?**

Students should consider taking the Comprehensive Examination if they:

- prefer to demonstrate mastery of their graduate studies through an examination that broadly tests their understanding of the knowledge obtained;
- do not have an original research project in communication they wish to conduct; and/or
- cannot commit substantial time to complete an original Master's thesis

### **When is the Comprehensive Examination Offered?**

The Comprehensive Examination is offered in the third week of November for the Fall semester, and in the third week of April for the Spring semester. Students may not take their Comprehensive Examination during either the Winter or Summer sessions.

### **When does One Apply for the Comprehensive Examination?**

Students must petition to take the Comprehensive Examination no later than the end of the semester prior to the term in which they plan to complete the examination. Review the University Academic Calendar to find out the exact deadline (i.e., the official date of the last day of the semester).

### **How does One Apply for the Comprehensive Examination?**

Fill out the Petition for Comprehensive Examination Option form and submit it to the Graduate Advisor.

### **Who is Part of the Comprehensive Examination Committee?**

The Graduate Advisor will assign committees during the last week of the first month of each semester. The Comprehensive Examination Committee consists of two examiners with one member serving as Chair. Examiners may or may not have been former professors of the student.

### **How does One Prepare for the Written Portion of the Comprehensive Examination?**

Students should begin preparing for the Comprehensive Examination well before their committee is assigned. Once the Graduate Committee appoints a student's Comprehensive Examination Committee, the student should meet with the Committee Chair to discuss procedures relevant to the examination. Individuals are responsible for the subject matter regardless of whom the instructor is/was. In other words, the Comprehensive Examination

Committee may or may not consist of those who taught the actual seminars completed by the student. The graduate committee will provide students with guidance about the nature of the comprehensive exam questions. Students should be familiar with all relevant literature integral to a particular area. Since the communication science examination is “closed book,” no notes may be taken into the examination room. Because the rhetoric examination is a take-home exam, students are expected to rely upon all relevant books, journal publications, and other resources available to them as they as they craft the most accurate and insightful answers possible.

Some study tips include:

- ✓ review the readings for each class
- ✓ take notes on the readings (focusing on – theory, methods, findings)
- ✓ review your class notes
- ✓ make note cards and/or “review sheets” to allow you to sort and conceptualize the information in different ways

#### **What Else Should be Completed in Advance?**

Students should schedule the Oral Defense date, time, and location with their committee members prior to beginning the Comprehensive Examination, if possible.

#### **What is the Content of the Comprehensive Examination?**

Questions are designed by graduate committee based on guidance provided by professors who taught the core for that cohort and in consultation with the faculty in general. Questions will require students to demonstrate their knowledge and comprehension of foundational theories and concepts through one or more of the following: application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation, or creation. Students will be encouraged to draw upon their work in core classes and related electives to answer their questions. Where appropriate, they will be provided social scientific studies or rhetorical artifact. Faculty may provide additional guidance about the content for which the student is responsible, may generate sample questions, or may assign reading lists to help students study for the examination. However, professors are not required to make this information available, and may elect not to provide this type of assistance. Students should understand that questions normally require critical thought and integration of material in original ways. For instance, questions may require students to explain a particular theory or compare and contrast one theory with another. Questions may ask students to apply a theory or research finding to a specific “real world” situation. Questions may have students unravel a methodological problem, describe the statistical procedures appropriate for a given research problem, or design a study.

#### **What is the Process of Taking the Comprehensive Examination?**

The Department will provide rooms in which candidates can write the examination. Students wishing to use computers may either bring their own computer or make arrangements with the graduate advisor. The Graduate Advisor or his/her designee will be available on each day of the

Comprehensive Examination to answer questions and address any difficulties that arise. The exams may or may not be proctored.

### **What is the Department's Policy on Cheating and Plagiarism?**

According to the university policy no. 21-01, cheating is “the act of obtaining, trying to obtain, or helping someone else to obtain academic credit for work by using dishonest, deceptive, or fraudulent means.” A student commits an act of cheating when they:

- copy from another student's test or assignment;
- have unauthorized discussions of answers on an exam;
- make, disseminate, or receive copies of the exam without permission;
- use online tools or services that are not authorized by the department for use on the exam;
- take the exam while posing as another student;
- commit plagiarism

The university defines plagiarism as “the act of using the ideas or work of another person or persons as if they were one's own, without giving credit to the source.” In order to ensure that students have not plagiarized, they must acknowledge original authorship “through appropriate references, i.e., quotation marks, footnotes, or commentary. [And] both quoted and paraphrased materials must be given proper citations.”

In the “closed book” portion of the exam, it is understood that students will not have access to textbooks, journal articles, and other published scholarly sources. Therefore, students will not be expected to provide complete citations in their answers. However, they are still expected to provide reasonable attempts at attribution when they make use of theories, concepts, and arguments produced by other scholars.

In the “open-book” portion of the exam, students may consult textbooks, journal articles, and other published scholarly materials as they prepare their answers. However, students may not solicit or receive assistance from any other person, nor may students assist any other student taking this exam. Students are expected to ensure that they are making every effort to cite sources any time they make use of an idea, concept, or the actual words of others.

Instances of cheating and plagiarism will result in immediate expulsion from the graduate program.

### **What is the Purpose of the Oral Defense?**

The purpose of the Oral Defense is to give students the opportunity to explain any revisions they feel would strengthen their written responses, to discuss the merits of his/her written portion, and to answer any questions from the Comprehensive Examination Committee. Although it is called a “defense,” students should not get defensive. Part of being a successful communication scholar is to be able to identify shortcomings, offer suggestions for revisions, discuss the contributions of an idea, and address questions or criticisms professionally. The

Comprehensive Examination Committee wants to cultivate your critical thinking about the field – this is what the Oral Defense is all about.

### **How should One Prepare for the Oral Defense?**

Re-read your answers with a critical eye. Identify gaps left in your discussion. Pinpoint mistakes you made in your arguments. Also, assess the strengths of your written responses (i.e., what do they contribute to our understanding of the field of communication?). Sometimes having another student review your answers can help with the process of evaluating weaknesses and strengths. Make notes of additional information you would add, corrections you would make, as well as the merits of your responses. Bring these notes with you to the defense. Continue to think about the questions and your answers. Since committee members are not obligated to talk to you in advance about the questions they intend to ask, it also may be helpful to think about the individual committee members – what are their areas of expertise, their research interests, etc.? Doing this may help you anticipate potential questions from these people.

### **What Should One Do Prior to the Oral Defense?**

At least one week in advance, students should confirm with all committee members the date, time, and location of the Oral Defense. Students also should verify that committee members have received all copies of their written responses.

### **How Does the Oral Defense Work?**

The procedure of the Oral Defense is up to the Chair of the Comprehensive Examination Committee. Here is an overview of a typical Oral Defense format: Once both committee members are present, the student will be asked to leave the room briefly so that committee members can collect their thoughts. Once the student is invited back into the room, he or she generally is provided an opportunity to add or correct any points in the written answers. This update/revision portion should not exceed 10 minutes. Committee members will follow the student's opening comments with their own questions. Although questions usually are focused on the student's written responses, follow-up questioning can cover a range of theories, methods, and topics covered in graduate study and undergraduate core classes. Generic questions might include trends in the field, perceptions of different theoretical/methodological perspectives, the student's research interests, the student's professional objectives, and so on. The committee is not looking for "right" or "wrong" answers – rather they expect students to be able to communicate competently about communication scholarship. Committees may elect to designate 2 hours for the oral exam but most orals only last 1 hour.

### **What Constitutes Passing the Oral Defense/Comprehensive Examination?**

A. Individuals members of the Comprehensive exam committee have three voting option: Pass, Fail, or Rewrite. Comprehensive Examination Committee may render one of the following decisions:

1. PASS – two votes to pass
2. FAIL – two votes to fail
3. REWRITE – any other possible combination of votes

If students PASS the Comprehensive Examination, the recommendation is forwarded to the Graduate Advisor by the Comprehensive Examination Committee Chair. Then, the Graduate Advisor will forward a Report of Final Examination to the Graduate Dean.

If students are required to REWRITE all or part of the Comprehensive Examination, they will be given the opportunity to revise only once in the area(s) of deficiency. Students must receive instructions for revisions within three working days of the Oral Defense. In some cases, committee members may provide new data sets, examples, or case studies to be used in the revision; but they should not invent new exam questions. Revisions are considered a part of the exam and, therefore, should be entirely and solely the work of the student. Seeking or receiving assistance from anyone on any part of comprehensive exams, including revisions, is a form of cheating and will result in immediate expulsion. Students revising a portion of their comps must schedule a 48 hour-window in the week following their defense when they will receive instructions, complete, and submit their revisions. The committee may require a second meeting during the final examination week to review the student's rewrite and decide whether the student passes or fails the Comprehensive Examination.

If students FAIL their original attempt at the Comprehensive Examination, committee members shall make themselves available to explain their decision and to facilitate the preparation of the retake of the examination. The examination can only be retaken one time. Students may petition to retake the examination no earlier than the semester following that in which they took the original Comprehensive Examination.

### **Appealing a Committee Decision:**

1.1. The primary authority of the comprehensive examination committee in the determination of the final outcome of the comprehensive exams process must be respected. The committee's decision must not be over-ridden merely because of a difference of opinion or evaluative judgment, provided it is formed in accordance with the generally accepted canons of the relevant discipline. The department presumes that the committee wants and tries to be non-prejudicial, objective, and consistent in its decision. This presumption, however, may be over-ridden by weight of evidence to the contrary.

1.2. Although the Communication Studies department presumes that comprehensive committee decisions are correct, the department has established this appeal procedure both to protect students against academic and administrative evaluations and decisions that are prejudicial, capricious, or arbitrary, and to preserve the authority of the comprehensive exam committee to evaluate a Master's Student's comprehensive exam answers in a non-prejudicial, objective, and consistent way. This procedure also preserves the rights of the committee to appeal the Graduate Committee's findings as outlined below.

1.3. The burden of proof rests upon the student submitting the appeal.



- 1.4. A student may appeal the decision of the committee only if the student believes that the committee's decision was prejudicial, capricious, or arbitrary.
- 1.6. Students must initiate an appeal within 5 business days after the comprehensive exam committee's judgment is rendered.
- 1.7. All comprehensive exam committee decision appeal information, whether written or oral, is confidential.
- 1.8. The student may seek the assistance of an advisor in the preparation of the appeal file.
- 1.9. The appeal will be evaluated by the Graduate Committee. Members of the Graduate Committee will be ineligible to serve on the review board if they are part of the original examining committee. If such eligibility reduces the membership of the Graduate Committee to fewer than three persons, a replacement will be selected by lottery from among remaining eligible members of the Department faculty.
- 1.10. In the process of making its determination, the committee may solicit further information from the student or the involved faculty members.
- 1.11. The graduate committee will not consider arguments about the faculty member's expertise, about the exam process, the graduate program's curriculum, or any other extenuating circumstance. The graduate committee's sole charge will be to determine if the student was treated in a prejudicial, capricious, or arbitrary fashion.
- 1.12. The committee can affirm the original decision, vote to pass the student, or vote to allow the student to re-take all or a portion of the exam with new committee members.
- 1.13. The original file, with all documentation, recommendations, final decisions, and all other materials (including a copy of the decision change, if relevant) shall be kept by the department for five years. One complete duplicate set of all documentation shall be kept in the office of the Academic Senate for five years. All other parties must destroy all duplicate materials within thirty instructional days of the final decision.
- 1.14. If the student's appeal is compounded (or accompanied) by an allegation of unlawful discrimination as defined by federal and state laws, the student has the right to access the university's internal unlawful discrimination process and the processes available through the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights and the state of California Fair Employment and Housing Commission.

## Thesis Option

A master's thesis is a written product of the systematic study of a significant problem. It clearly

identifies the problem, states the major assumptions, explains the significance of the undertaking, sets forth the sources for and methods of gathering information, analyzes the data, and offers a conclusion or recommendation. The finished product evidences originality, critical and independent thinking, appropriate organization and format, and thorough documentation. It is authored by a master's candidate with guidance from a faculty Thesis Chair and Committee. Upon completion, it is defended before the Thesis Committee and submitted for their approval. The following is a description of the steps necessary to completing this option.

### **Electing the Thesis Option**

Positioning oneself for even the conduct of original research (much less its completion, writing, and approval!) is a lengthy process that should be anticipated and prepared for far in advance. Four necessary steps must be taken before a student is allowed to enroll in COMM 698- four required course units normally taken in the last semester of the M.A. program that represent the independent work a student conducts in completing their thesis.

#### *A. Advance to Candidacy.*

A student may not enroll in COMM 698 until after Advancement to Candidacy or, in rare cases, when advancement occurs in the same semester as the initial enrollment. Thus, Advancement to Candidacy should normally occur the semester prior to enrollment in COMM 698. Note that the Department facilitates such timely advancement of students writing a thesis by allowing them to submit an advancement form listing ten courses (30 units) or more and starring (\*) the course or courses to be omitted if the thesis option is selected.

#### *B. Select a Thesis Chair and Committee.*

A student is responsible for securing all faculty to serve on her or his Thesis Committee. The committee chair must be a member of the Department's graduate faculty and is selected first. The chair normally serves as the director of the student's research and will be the person with whom the student works most closely. In rare circumstances, the role of thesis director may be filled by a committee member other than the chair, but must be a person qualified in the specific area of the thesis. Generally, the chair/thesis director is responsible for ensuring that the student has the proper preparation to pursue the proposed thesis, establishing guidelines and timetables, assuring that the appropriate editorial and format standards are followed, and directing the oral defense. Ideally, chair selection represents the mutual interests of both faculty and students, thus students are encouraged to interact with all faculty to determine with whom their interests overlap most.

After the committee chair is chosen, the remaining committee members are selected. This is done in consultation with the chair as she or he will oversee the other committee members' work with the student. At least two members of a three-person committee, or three members of a five-person committee, must be tenure-track or tenured faculty from the Department of Communication Studies. Faculty holding parallel status in other departments at CSULB or in other Communication Studies departments in the CSU system may fill the other

slots on the committee.

Before agreeing to serve on the Thesis Committee, the prospective members will review the thesis topic (minimally in the form of a 2-3 page abstract, ideally in the form of a nearly complete prospectus, see below) and determine that they possess the requisite expertise and that they are reasonably available to the student to support such a study.

### *C. Complete a Thesis Prospectus*

Generally, a Thesis Prospectus provides a description of the focus and rationale for the research project, a review of related literature, procedures for conducting the research project, and the format of the final thesis. The research project should be more than a minor extension of a seminar project; it should constitute an original contribution to literature in communication studies and should develop a student's research abilities. Although the precise content of each prospectus may vary, it must be a detailed plan for the conduct of a specific research project. As such, it functions as a contract between thesis committees and a student regarding the scope of the proposed project. A detailed prospectus reduces the chance of misunderstandings between all parties involved, and thus enhances a student's opportunity for success.

The prospectus normally begins as an abstract of preliminary thesis ideas, in either narrative or outline format, that serves to guide preliminary talks with prospective committee members, especially the chair. In addition to faculty, consult published research, completed theses, and the University manual titled *Master's Theses and Projects: Guide to Style and Format* (available either at the Thesis Office in the University Library or from the library's reserve desk) for both ideas about and models for a thesis research project. An abstract is transformed into a prospectus normally in consultation with the Thesis Committee Chair (especially) and other committee members. Its precise length and format may vary depending on the nature of the research project and the expectations of the committee. Even so, the prospectus typically translates as two nearly complete chapters of the final Thesis (e.g., review of literature and methods sections in an empirical study). A candidate must have a completed prospectus approved by all members of her/his Thesis Committee. Acceptance of the prospectus by members of the Thesis Committee—usually in a 1 hour-long prospectus meeting—certifies both their acceptability of the thesis research project and their willingness to direct the student's thesis.

### *D. Submit the "Petition for Permission to Elect the Thesis Option" and an Approved Prospectus*

This form provides space for the signatures of the proposed committee members certifying their willingness to serve on the committee and their approval of the candidate's prospectus. Candidates must submit this form along with a completed prospectus to the Graduate Advisor no later than the semester prior to that in which the thesis is to be completed. Any change in the composition of the committee requires justification and must be approved by the Department's graduate advisor and college associate dean or director of graduate studies.

## **Completing the Thesis**

Once permission to elect the Thesis Option has been granted, the candidate now must complete the thesis research project detailed in the prospectus. At this point a student may not change to the Comprehensive Examination Option except by special permission of the Graduate Committee. Beyond work on the project itself, completing the thesis also involves enrolling in COMM 698, working with the Thesis Committee, adhering to University specifications and deadlines, and receiving approval.

#### *A. Enroll in COMM 698*

Enrollment in **three (3)** units of COMM 698 represents the independent work a student conducts in completing their thesis. "Credit" will be awarded if satisfactory and continuous progress is made on the thesis research project. If a candidate does not demonstrate satisfactory and continuous progress on the thesis after enrolling in COMM 698, the Graduate Committee, on the recommendation of the Thesis Committee and/or the Graduate Advisor, may terminate the student's graduate program. This action may be taken either while the student is enrolled in COMM 698 (in which case a "No Credit" will be awarded), or afterward. The Department may endorse a petition for one semester of concurrent enrollment in COMM 698 and in another graduate or professional school only if the candidate's Thesis Committee presents evidence that a draft of the thesis requiring only mechanical revision has been submitted. Once a semester of COMM 698 has been completed, a candidate cannot change to the Comprehensive Examination Option under any condition.

#### *B. Work with the Thesis Committee*

Thesis Committee members are among the most important people in the candidate's academic life. Keeping the committee happy demands a great deal of the student's attention, thus consider the following suggestions. First, visit the committee members periodically and report on your progress. This helps both to maintain good relations and to uncover any potential troublespots regarding members' approval of the thesis. Second, find resolutions to differences of opinions. A student does not have to agree with all suggestions, however a thoughtful and acceptable rationale should be provided in cases where a recommendation is not followed. Third, provide each committee member with their own copy of the next-to-last draft of the thesis two weeks prior to the defense date. Most faculty resent being asked to a defense when they have not seen the thesis until a few days before the defense or if it is presented to them as a finished product. It is important to note that neither the Thesis Committee nor the Department is responsible for advising or supervising thesis candidates when they are not enrolled in the graduate program.

#### *C. Adhere to University specifications and deadlines*

The master's thesis is a formal document that is cataloged and saved in the University library for study by other scholars of communication for years to come. Therefore, the form and style of the thesis is quite exacting. The Thesis office in the University Library (x54013) will verify that each thesis meets both the format criteria prescribed by the University and all University procedural requirements for theses. Students should purchase a copy of *Master's Theses and Projects: Guide to Style and Format* (available either at the Thesis Office in the

University Library or from the library's reserve desk) and attend one of the periodic workshops presented by the thesis reviewer on how to prepare a thesis at CSULB. In addition, students should also consult thesis guidelines available in the following manuals: Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*; *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*; or *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*.

#### D. Receive approval of the completed thesis

Once a student's thesis director indicates that her or his thesis is ready for approval, an oral defense must be scheduled. An oral defense should be scheduled with the Thesis Committee at least two weeks prior to the deadline for depositing theses in the University Library in order to allow time for revisions. This advance time, coupled with the advance time necessary for the Thesis Committee to read the thesis before the defense means that a candidate should finish their next-to-last draft of the thesis ideally four weeks before the Thesis Office's deadline for deposit (which comes earlier than most students expect!).

The oral defense takes place before the Thesis Committee and is directed by the Thesis Chair. The defense is public, so other faculty and students may choose to attend. Upon arrival of the entire committee, the candidate may be asked to leave the room while the committee members discuss their initial reactions to the thesis. Upon returning, the candidate may be asked to provide a brief summary of the thesis project and its highlights, after which the committee questions that candidate. Questions can cover any topics deemed relevant to the thesis and the candidate's knowledge of any other areas of their graduate studies.

After the defense, the candidate will be asked to leave the room again while approval of the thesis is decided. The decision is by secret ballot and requires a majority vote. The committee may decide one of three actions: 1) approve the thesis as submitted, 2) approve the thesis with specified changes, 3) not approve the thesis. The committee members will notify candidates of their decision immediately after it is made. A candidate whose thesis and/or defense does not receive approval may revise and resubmit the thesis and/or defend it no sooner than the following semester. Resubmission or redefense, however, may take place only once.

Among the three actions possible, the second option is the most frequent outcome. The Thesis Committee often will have the Thesis Chair supervise the changes, thus members may be willing to sign approval on the spot (so bring your signature page with you- this page must conform to the specifications established by the Thesis Office). Alternatively, committee members may wait for the Thesis Chair to sign off after the changes have been made before they sign. After the requisite signatures have been acquired, a completed draft must be submitted to the University Thesis Reviewer for their approval. With approval, the thesis is deposited in the library and copies are given to the Department, the Thesis Chair, and usually to other Committee Members. After that, the thesis is officially complete!

## Graduation

All requirements of the degree program must be completed within seven years of the date when the first course appearing on the student program was completed. **A graduate student who expects to receive a degree at the end of any semester or summer session must be enrolled during that term and must complete the Request to Graduate Form within the first three weeks of classes of the prior semester.** Students completing their degrees in May or in the following summer session should file the application by the preceding October 1. Students completing their degrees January should file by the preceding February 15 at the Admissions and Records Office. Graduate Studies 700 may be used to fulfill the enrollment requirement if the applicant has completed all degree program coursework prior to the semester of graduation.

## Graduate Teaching Assistantships

A limited number of Teaching Graduate Assistantships are awarded on a competitive basis. These positions may involve assisting faculty in teaching, leading lab sections of large lecture classes, or teaching individual sections of a multi-section course. Complete information on the requirements and responsibilities of Graduate Teaching Assistants is provided in the TA handbook, available from the TA coordinator. Below is an overview of the departmental criteria for hiring Graduate Teaching Assistants:

### *Departmental Criteria for Hiring Graduate Teaching Associates*

Unanimously approved by a vote of the faculty (8-26-04)

1. Acceptance into the Department's Graduate Program.
2. A Bachelor's degree from a fully accredited college or university.
3. Cumulative undergraduate G.P.A. of 3.0 with preference given to those with 3.2 in the last 60 units OR an undergraduate G.P.A. in the Major of 3.6 or above.
4. Three letters of recommendation from faculty which speak to both the candidate's academic and teaching background and/or potential. Moreover, we require a copy of official transcripts and GRE scores. Even though no minimum score on the GRE's is required, scores may be used in the evaluation process.
5. In accordance with University policy 96-21, "a graduate student employed as a GTA must be enrolled in at least 6 units, unless that graduate student has less than 6 units remaining to be completed on the graduate program or fewer than 6 units on the graduate program are being offered. A GTA whose appointment is not renewed because of a failure to maintain enrollment will not be eligible for further employment as a GTA until one full semester has passed."
6. If currently a graduate student in the discipline, candidate must have no grades

lower than a B in graduate course work.

7. Demonstration of teaching potential or experience (i.e., good oral and written communication skills).
8. Relevant course or research background in the content area the GTA would be teaching.

\*Exceptions to these criteria may be granted with the approval of BOTH the Department Chair AND the Personnel Committee (in consultation with the TA Director and the Graduate Advisor).

To assess GTA performance, the TA Director will provide the Personnel Committee with a written evaluation of each GTA along with a copy of a review file/teaching portfolio prepared by GTAs. To determine if GTA appointments will be renewed, GTAs must receive satisfactory evaluations from the Personnel Committee on their 1) progress toward their degree, 2) the quality of instruction, and 3) their fulfillment of professional responsibilities.

Satisfactory *progress toward degree* means:

- In accordance with University policy 96-21, “a graduate student employed as a GTA must be enrolled in at least 6 units, unless that graduate student has less than 6 units remaining to be completed on the graduate program or fewer than 6 units on the graduate program are being offered. A GTA whose appointment is not renewed because of a failure to maintain enrollment will not be eligible for further employment as a GTA until one full semester has passed.”
- GTAs may not receive a grade lower than a B in any course that counts toward their graduate degree.
- Incompletes are strongly discouraged. Incompletes unresolved after 1 semester may negatively affect GTAs’ eligibility for re-appointment.

Satisfactory *quality of instruction* means:

- With a range of 1-6 with 6 = excellent, TAs are expected to receive composite student evaluations above 4.2.
- Written feedback on the observation of GTAs teaching performance by the TA Director and/or the Course Director should be generally positive in nature.
- GTAs should provide prompt evaluation of student work with sufficient feedback.
- GTAs must maintain grading procedures and practices that are consistent with guidelines specified by the Course Director.

Satisfactory *fulfillment of professional responsibilities* means:

- Regular attendance and participation at all GTA faculty meetings.
- Regular attendance and participation at pre-semester GTA training sessions.
- Meeting classes on time at every scheduled class meeting for the full length of time.

- Face-to-face availability during stated office hours.
- Maintenance of accurate, detailed student records.
- Preparation of a thorough, organized review file/teaching portfolio.

\*Exceptions to these criteria may be granted with the approval of BOTH the Department Chair AND the Personnel Committee (in consultation with the TA Director and the Graduate Advisor).