



**Graduate Program in Communication and Media Studies  
Department of Communication, Media and Film  
Doctoral Candidacy Requirements**

The University of Calgary [Doctoral Candidacy Regulations](#) (“the Regulations”) govern the conduct of admission to candidacy at the University of Calgary. This document establishes program-specific requirements associated with the conduct of admission to graduate candidacy under the *Regulations*.

**A. Statement of Purpose**

A student admitted to Candidacy in the Graduate Program in Communication and Media Studies should demonstrate readiness and ability to pursue and complete original independent research at the doctoral level. They should have a solid foundation in the discipline of Communication and Media Studies; demonstrate familiarity with and ability to critically discuss the literature, theories, and methods most relevant to their chosen area of research; produce sophisticated oral and written discourse with sound, substantive, logical argumentation that convinces examiners of their maturity as a researcher; and have a well-conceptualized plan for their dissertation research.

**B. Candidacy Components**

All doctoral students in the Graduate Program in Communication and Media Studies must successfully complete the following components:

- 1) course requirements as identified in the graduate calendar
- 2) a description of the research area, the identification of two fields of study, and the creation of a reading list for each field of study
- 3) a written exam on the two fields of study
- 4) an oral exam on the two fields of study
- 5) a dissertation proposal approved by their supervisory committee.

**1. COURSES**

In the first eight months of their program, the student must complete all courses required in the program as set out in the graduate calendar. The supervisor will confirm the student’s status with the Graduate Program Administrator before moving on to the next stage of the candidacy.

**2. SELECTION OF SUPERVISOR AND FORMATION OF SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE**

At the start of a student’s program, an interim supervisor is appointed by the department. A permanent supervisor (and co-supervisor if required) should be in place by the end of the sixth month of the student’s first year of study. The student may continue with the interim supervisor or they may change to another supervisor whose expertise more closely aligns with their research interests. The supervisor, in consultation with the student, chooses

two additional academics with relevant expertise to form the supervisory committee. Normally those members are faculty from within the department. One member may be from outside the department. The supervisory committee (including the co-supervisor if one has been appointed) acts as the examining committee for the written fields of study exam, the fields of study oral exam, and the dissertation proposal meeting.

### **3. IDENTIFICATION OF RESEARCH AREA, FIELDS OF STUDY, AND THE FIELDS OF STUDY READING LISTS; WRITTEN AND ORAL FIELDS OF STUDY EXAMS**

#### **Stage 1: Identification and Approval of Research Area, Fields of Study and the Fields of Study Reading Lists**

**The student will submit their description of the research area and two proposed fields of study with a reading list for each field to their supervisory committee (and co-supervisor) by the end of the student's ninth month of study.**

##### **a) Description of the research area:**

**The description of the research area is not a formal dissertation proposal but is, rather, a thorough preliminary proposal, to assist in the identification of two appropriate fields of study.** The description of the research area will include a research question, a brief summary of the literature and theoretical framework in which the question is situated, and an overview of possible methodological approaches for the study. The description of the research area will be a minimum of 10 pages (2500 words) to a maximum of 15 pages (3750 words) in length.

##### **b) Reading lists for the fields of study:**

In addition to the description of the research area, the student will identify two fields of study with a one page description of each field and will supply a reading list for each field of study (35-50 items depending on the nature of the fields). These two fields of study will intersect/contextualize/underlie the proposed research area. One field of study will normally address an established subfield within communication and media studies, while the second field of study will normally focus on more specific research related to the dissertation topic. Given the rapid evolution of digital technology and the interdisciplinary nature of communication and media studies, the fields will be tailored to the student's specific research interests.<sup>1</sup>

Students should compose their reading lists with the following considerations in mind: questions asked by scholars in the field, the influence of key investigators and their work, path of development of the field (e.g. the chronology of focus points in the literature), perceptions of

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<sup>1</sup> The Graduate Program also runs a non-credit course, Thesis 212, for PhD students during their first year of study which targets the preparation of the research area document and identification of fields of study in its meetings.

the parameters of the field, key books or articles that mark the beginning or turning points within the field, central debates, theoretical approaches that underpin research, and methodological approaches (qualitative and/or quantitative) that dominate the literature. These considerations about the fields will also form the basis of questions that students will encounter in the written exam.

**c) Approval process:**

Two weeks after submission of the documents above (the description of the research area, descriptions of two fields of study and their reading lists), the supervisory committee meets with the student.

In the meeting with the student, the supervisory committee will discuss the submissions (research area, field identification, and reading lists). The supervisory committee can suggest amendments to the submissions or they can approve the documents as presented. Approval must be unanimous. The supervisory committee will indicate their approval by signing the Fields of Study Approval I (**Research Area, 2 Fields of Study, Reading Lists**) form.

If approval is not unanimous and alterations are required to the submissions, these changes will be confirmed in writing to the student by the supervisor. The student will submit revisions to the documents within two weeks of the meeting. The Supervisory Committee can delegate approval of the revisions to the supervisor or they can choose to have a second meeting with the student to approve the revisions. Approval of the revised documents by the supervisory committee must be unanimous and they must all sign the Field of Study Approval I form.

The approval of the research area, the two fields of study and their reading lists by the supervisory committee must be obtained before the student can proceed to Stage 2. If the revisions to the submissions are still unsatisfactory, the student will be required to withdraw from the program. In the case of a failed outcome, the student has the right to appeal. Students must appeal directly to the Faculty of Graduate Studies. Please see the Faculty of Graduate Studies Calendar ([Academic Regulations](#)-Appeals–Appeals against Faculty of Graduate Studies Rulings).

**Stage 2: Fields of Study Written Exam**

**The written field of study exam has two sections; there is one section for each of the two fields of study. Students are required to choose one question in each field and write one essay response for each field: two papers in total.**

The student will receive the written fields of study exam no sooner than four months after the date of the approval of the research area, fields of study and reading lists by the supervisory committee. The student will have two weeks to submit their answers. The supervisory committee (and a co-supervisor if one has been appointed) acts as the examining committee.

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The exam is created by the supervisor in consultation with the other members of the supervisory committee. At least three (3) weeks before the student receives the exam, the supervisor solicits possible questions from the other members of the supervisory committee. The supervisor creates the exam from these proposed questions and through discussions with the members of the supervisory committee. The supervisor makes the final decision about the questions given to the student. In the case of a co-supervisory situation, both supervisors must agree on the exam questions. There must be a minimum of three (3) questions for each field of study. Students will answer one question about each field of study with a written response. Each answer will be 15-20 pages in length (3750-5000 words), plus references in an appropriate style (e.g. APA, MLA). The student will have **two weeks** to complete and submit their exam answers to the department's Graduate Program Office.

**Assessment of the Fields of Study written exam:**

It is expected that the student's written exam will demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of all the items on the reading lists. The student should approach the readings with the same considerations (listed above in Stage 1-b) that were used to create the list of readings. An acceptable exam answer will be a clearly composed and logically organized discourse that shows maturity and independence in defending assessments of the literature.

The supervisory committee has one week from the receipt of the written exam to judge each of the written responses as a pass or fail. Their responses are submitted to the department's Graduate Program office on the department's **Fields of Study Approval II (written Fields of Study exam)** form. If both of the answers are a pass, the exam as a whole is a pass. To qualify as a pass, an exam response can receive no more than one fail assessment. If one of the two written responses is a "fail", a re-take examination in that Field will be permitted. If both of the written examinations are a "fail", then re-take examinations in both Fields will be permitted. Re-take exams will be written no sooner than two months and no later than six months after the student has been notified of the exam results.

The Graduate Program Director will inform the student and the supervisory committee if one or both of the exam answers have failed.

In the case of an exam in which one of the two answers has failed, the Graduate Program Director will ask each member of the committee to submit a written assessment of the answer within two (2) business days, whether or not they judged that answer as a pass or fail. The student will have one opportunity to rewrite the failed answer.

In a case where both answers have failed, the same procedure will be undertaken. The Graduate Program Director will ask each member of the supervisory committee to provide a written assessment of both answers within two (2) business days, whether or not they judged the answers as a pass or fail. The student will have one opportunity to rewrite the failed answers.

The assessments by the committee must explain the deficiencies in the failed answer and suggest remedial possibilities. For example, was it case of missing appropriate readings, or

an incorrect understanding of a reading, or generally poor writing and argumentation? The written assessments will be given to the student and the supervisor.

Re-take exams must be written no sooner than two and no later than six months after the failure. A suitable date will be decided by the supervisor and the student in the context of the remedial actions that have been suggested by the committee. A second fail in the re-take exam will require the student to withdraw from the program.

In the case of failed outcomes, the student has the right to appeal. The student must appeal directly to the Faculty of Graduate Studies. Please see the Faculty of Graduate Studies Calendar ([Academic Regulations](#)-Appeals–Appeals against Faculty of Graduate Studies Rulings).

### **Stage 3: Fields of Study Oral Exam**

**The oral exam of the Fields of Study will be scheduled no sooner than three weeks and no later than four weeks following the receipt of the exam questions.**

When the student receives the questions for the written exam, a date for the oral exam will be scheduled by the Graduate Program office in consultation with the supervisor (and co-supervisor if appointed) and the student. The oral exam will be scheduled no sooner than three weeks and no later than four weeks following the receipt of the exam questions. This scheduling allows for the two weeks in which the student writes and submits the exam, and the one week given to the supervisory committee to assess the exam. If the student fails the written exam, the oral exam is cancelled.

The examination committee consists of the supervisory committee including the co-supervisor if one has been appointed. The supervisor chairs the exam. Each of the examining committee members will take turns asking questions, including the chair. The student will be given sufficient time to answer the questions as completely as possible. There are normally two rounds of questions but more rounds may occur as long as the exam does not exceed two hours. The student may take notes as questions are asked and they are permitted to bring other materials into the exam, especially their written field of study answers. At the end of the oral exam, the student is asked to leave the room before the committee's deliberations begin, then returns to hear the committee's decision.

### **Assessment of the Fields of Study oral exam:**

The questions asked of the student in the oral exam will arise from the student's written responses to the fields of study questions and from those questions not answered on the written exams. The latter questions arise as a way of judging a comprehensive grasp of all items on the reading list and of the fields. An acceptable oral defense includes clear and cogent responses to questions posed by the supervisory committee.

The supervisory committee assesses the oral exam with a vote of pass or fail. Before the discussion begins after the student has left the room, each examiner must identify by secret ballot, their non-binding recommendation for a pass or fail. After the balloting is finished,

discussion among the examiners ensues. A unanimous pass is required by the committee for the student to pass the oral exam. In this case, the supervisory committee signs the **Fields of Study Approval III (Fields of Study Oral Exam)** form. If the outcome includes one or more negative votes, the student will fail.

In the case of a fail, each committee member will be required to provide the Graduate Program Director with a written report within two (2) business days that records the rationale for their vote. The Graduate Program Director will either support or deny the decision of the supervisory committee. The Graduate Program Director will inform the supervisory committee and the student of their decision in writing within five (5) working days of the oral exam and notify the Dean of Graduate Studies. In the case of a fail, the student will receive written feedback from the Graduate Program Director on the nature of the deficiencies. The student may appeal the decision as explained in the Graduate Calendar. Please see the Faculty of Graduate Studies Calendar ([Academic Regulations](#)–Appeals–Appeals against Faculty of Graduate Studies Rulings).

If the decision is a fail, the student has only one opportunity to re-take the oral exam no sooner than two and no later than six months from the date of the original exam. The same procedures will be followed as in the first attempt.

#### **4. DISSERTATION PROPOSAL**

When the fields of study exams are successfully completed, the student begins preparation of their dissertation proposal which must be submitted within four months of the successful completion of their oral fields of study exam.

The dissertation proposal will be 25-30 double-spaced pages in length plus bibliography. An acceptable research proposal demonstrates readiness to undertake the research project by:

1. providing a clear and concise statement of the issue to be investigated and formulating a question(s) that will be answered in the research.
2. situating the question within relevant theory, literature and chosen methodology(ies) to answer the proposed research question(s). The description of the methodology includes details about the collection of research material and the proposed methods for the analysis of that material.
3. discussing any ethical contexts that impinge on the conduct of the research in anticipation of the ethics approval process at the University of Calgary.
4. including the following appendices: a bibliography, an outline of proposed chapters, and a schedule for the dissertation project.

The supervisory committee provides ongoing feedback and guidance to the student until the supervisory committee agrees that the research proposal is satisfactory. Within two weeks of receiving the student's final proposal, the supervisor (and co-supervisor if one is

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appointed) schedules a meeting with the supervisory committee to evaluate the dissertation proposal. Following the discussion of the final proposal, the student leaves the room to allow the supervisory committee to deliberate. The possible outcomes are a pass without revision, a pass with minor revisions, or a fail. The decision for a pass without revision or with minor revisions must be unanimous. If it is a pass with minor revisions, the supervisory committee can delegate final approval to the supervisor, or they can arrange for another meeting with the student.

If one or more committee members feels the proposal is unsatisfactory, then the proposal is a fail. In this case, each committee member must submit a report to the supervisor detailing their assessment. The reports will be used by the supervisor and student to construct a plan for resubmission to the committee no sooner than two and no later than six months after the proposal meeting. If the proposal is not successful at the second meeting, the student will be required to withdraw from the program. A student has the right to appeal the committee's decision to the Faculty of Graduate Studies. See the Faculty of Graduate Studies Calendar ([Academic Regulations](#)-Appeals–Appeals against Faculty of Graduate Studies Rulings).

For this candidacy requirement to be completed, the supervisory committee must sign to indicate their approval on the department's **Approval of Dissertation Proposal** form.

It is recognized that changes may be made to the research proposal after the student's successful completion of the dissertation proposal and prior to submission for ethics approval.

Successful completion of all parts of the candidacy process (courses, fields of study written and oral exams, and approval of the dissertation proposal) admits the student to candidacy for the doctoral degree in the Graduate Program in Communication and Media Studies in the Department of Communication, Media and Film.